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Interview with Jeremiah Wright

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1 Transcript of interview with Rev Dr Jeremiah Wright

2 This videotaped interview was conducted and transcribed by Arlen Parsa
3 (arlen.parsa@gmail.com) on March 24th, 2009 for the Chicago Anti-Apartheid
4 Movement Collection Archives at Columbia College Chicago. The interviewer
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7

8 [Tape 1 of 3 begins.]

9 ARLEN PARSA: My name is Arlen Parsa, what is your full name?

10 JEREMIAH WRIGHT: Are we recording?

11 AP: Yes.

12 JW: Jeremiah Alvesta Wright, Junior is my full name.

13 AP: Perfect, good. And today is the 24th, today?

14 JW: Yes it is.

15 AP: Okay so March 24th, 2009. This interview is taking place at your office, so what
16 were the approximate years of your anti-Apartheid activism?

17 JW: I would say the approximate years of my-- is your voice being picked up also? --
18 Would be 1973 up until the end of Apartheid.

19 AP: Okay. And what is the location of your activism?

20 JW: You mean here? The city of Chicago, primarily. Those years span my
21 involvement and my participation in two other-- really three other-- national and
22 international agencies that had feed into the movement. One is my participation
23 with the Trans-Africa forum, Randall Robinson was the executive director, I was on
24 the Board of Directors of Trans-Africa, and the other two related, were
25 denominational-related. I was on the Commission for Racial Justice of the United
26 Church of Christ and served as the Vide President for the Commission for Racial
27 Justice, and I was also the Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Office for Church
28 and Society which is our denomination's social justice ministry, social witness
29 ministry, that monitors legislation and monitors activities of all of the governments,
30 local municipal, state, national and internationally in terms of positions that the
31 denomination has taken on issues such as apartheid, so my involvement was in
32 those three levels and those three different ways.

33 AP: Okay, good, and we'll obviously get into more detail. So starting off at the
34 beginning, what was the year of your birth?

35 JW: 1941, September 22nd, 1941.

36 AP: And what was the place of your birth?

37 JW: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

38 AP: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And were you raised there?

39 JW: Raised right there. My parents raised me, I would say, nine and a half to ten
40 months of the year raised there. My parents were from Virginia, both of them were
41 from Virginia, different parts of Virginia, and they met in college, but their families
42 were still in Virginia, so every holiday, Christmas holiday or summer holidays,
43 especially when my mother was in grad school, we would, my sisters the two of us,
44 would be back in the country, which I hated, and for the summer times which was
45 fun, and so between Philadelphia and Virginia, those two places were the two places
46 where I was raised.

47 AP: Well you already got ahead of me, I was about to ask where was your father's
48 place of birth?

49 JW: Caroline County, Virginia, and my mother's place of birth is Surry County,
50 Virginia. Caroline is a place that most of your listeners to the oral history will have
51 no clue about. It's between Fredericksburg, Virginia, those are the two closest big
52 cities, Fredericksburg and Richmond Virginia, it sits right between the two. Surrey
53 County, my mother's, is in the tidewater area; Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, is
54 where Surrey County is.

55 AP: Okay. So what was your earliest memory, and about what year might it have
56 been?

57 JW: Of what?

58 AP: Of anything.

59 JW: Oh, anything? Oh gosh. I remember when I still slept in the crib. My parents had
60 two bedrooms at the time, my sister slept in one, she's sixteen months older than I. I
61 slept, my crib was in their bedroom, and I remember where I used to play a game
62 where I would wait until I could hear them snoring, or thought they were asleep,
63 and I would climb out of the crib, and get into their bed, that's my earliest memory,
64 of living in that house where we lived. I was young enough to be in the crib, but old
65 enough to be able to climb out of the crib so I wasn't like in danger of falling, I was
66 old enough to negotiate that crib climb.

67 AP: How old might you have been?

68 JW: I would say, between two and a half and three. We moved from that home to our
69 second home, the home in which all of our formative years were spent, when I was
70 in kindergarten, or the year I started kindergarten, we moved into that second
71 residence, Philadelphia.

72 AP: And what did your father do for a living?

73 JW: He pastored a church in Philadelphia, Germantown. Germantown Philadelphia is
74 like Morgan Park in Chicago, a section of Philadelphia. He pastored for forty-two
75 years before he retired.

76 AP: And how about your mother?

77 JW: She was an educator. Phenomenal, she had her PASTOR ROSS? at fifteen, had her
78 first Master's at seventeen, her second Master's at nineteen, and her PhD from the
79 University of Chicago. She did her first Master's at University of Chicago, second
80 Master's at Pennsylvania. She taught in the public school system of Philadelphia
81 until she became an Administrator. When she retired, she became the Vice
82 President-- Principle, pardon me, of the Philadelphia High School for Girls in
83 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

84 AP: Okay. Um, so what kind of child were you in elementary school?

85 JW: Ah, I was always a good student, I was an exceptional student. My parents,
86 especially my dad, raised us in an atypical fashion. First of all, when I was very small
87 when I went to school, there was no television in the house. I think I was somewhere
88 around thirteen, twelve, when we got our first television. And when we got it, our
89 father would only let us watch one hour of television. You could pick two thirty-
90 minute shows or one hour show. But then you had to read. Now my sister, she's a
91 great student in terms of being diligent, and I used to say being a teacher's pet
92 because if the teacher said read to page fifty, she'd go seventy-five, eighty, ninety. I'd
93 stop right at fifty. But I had to read some because my father would not let us just sit
94 around. There was no television, and when we had it, we couldn't have it on. We
95 couldn't have the radio on, we had to do reading. And I spent countless hours in his,
96 in his, in his library. So that I was on the honor roll, all through elementary school,
97 all through junior high, practically. When I was in Philly, we didn't have middle
98 schools, we had junior high schools. And then we got accepted into Central High
99 School, which was an accelerated program, all male school for kids whose IQs and
100 whose grade scores were a certain level. I got accepted into Central and I finished
101 Central early. I had too many credits and I thought I was going-- back then we had
102 half years, you had 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, I thought I was going into 12A, and when they
103 handed me my report card at the end of the semester and they said 12B and I said
104 there's a mistake and they said no, you're going to-- So I got put into a class to
105 graduate ahead of my class, I didn't know anybody in that-- I'd seen them around
106 halls, seen them around school or seen them in the band or something like
107 orchestra, but I didn't know them. I didn't hang with those guys, but I ended up
108 graduating early so that ended up being a good year. I mean a good childhood in
109 terms of school, in terms of fun, I had a singing group in high school, we played in
110 the band, it was not only high school band, high school marching band, high school
111 jazz band, played in the all Philadelphia senior orchestra, sang in the church choir, a
112 lot of-- I played football but they teased me. I played football in the eleventh and
113 twelfth grades and when I got to college I got into the college [level]. My mother
114 said, when she came down, I think it was either Christmas or the end of the
115 academic year, she, I introduced her to some of the guys who were standing in front

116 of the dormitory, one of whom was left tackle. Baby lam we called him, he's about
 117 three-ninety [laughter]. All muscle, and she said to me, I wonder why you didn't play
 118 football into college and I see why now. Those guys woulda killed you. But it was a
 119 good school, I mean my school years were lots of fun.

120 AP: Who was your favorite teacher?

121 JW: I don't know. I would say in elementary school, Mrs Kerr, K-E-R-R. I remember
 122 her vividly. I don't think I had one in high school who was a favorite. But Mrs Kerr
 123 was in my elementary school years, was my favorite teacher.

124 AP: Why?

125 JW: She would, she would, well she was doing, she would push us. And she was the
 126 only teacher who would respond to me sensitively. When I say respond to me
 127 sensitively, I mean this. My father made us read. I was in his study as I said. Now my
 128 father finished a junior union university. My father, I should say, I teased him,
 129 "you've got more letters behind your name than in your name [laughter]-- you've
 130 got a master of theology, master of arts and divinity, master of sacred theology." And
 131 he studied African American history under Carter's ??eulitza??, he studied Sterling
 132 Brown, Arthur Davis, the guys, that put together ??Carmen?? and I'm just lost in his
 133 library, reading and reading and reading and reading. And uh, when I got to those
 134 years when you have to learn dates, 1776, 1812, the Tilden Hayes-- Tilden Hayes
 135 Compromise, he said the best way to memorize those dates is, he took me to his
 136 library, memorize every time you have to memorize a date in American history,
 137 memorize a date in your own history. What was going on in Africa? What was going
 138 on in the African Diaspora? In Cuba, in Panama, wherever Africans were taken.
 139 Learn those years that way, so I'm learning stuff but now I go back to class and we
 140 ain't talkin about none of that, so I would ask teachers and I would get these funny
 141 looks, except for Mrs Kerr. She would answer me and she would explain to me she
 142 knew my parents, and so she said well you know when you for instance when you
 143 go with your parents home, you know how things are in the South-- it was
 144 segregated-- said yeah, she said that's why that's not in these books. The people who
 145 write these books are just like the people who won't let you in the washroom down
 146 there or drinking from the water fountains down there. And, but she would talk to
 147 me about what I had read, and she sometimes initiated the conversation. During
 148 recess, she said what'd you read last name? What'd you learn last night? And she
 149 would, and I found that fun to be able to talk to her and somebody who wanted to
 150 know, and she would write down the names of the books and go get them herself.
 151 And she said Imma give you a test, I said don't do that! [laughter] But she was that
 152 kind of engaging teacher who was interested to me, gosh, let's see, sixth grade I
 153 would be, what, thirteen, so that would be fifty one, fifty three... If she had a
 154 prejudiced bone her her body, I didn't know it. And that's why she sticks out so
 155 much in my mind.

156 AP: This is really interesting stuff. What kind of aspirations did you have in high
 157 school?

158 JW: In high school, I wanted, well cause I said my father was um, my father was a
 159 trained clergy-person and because a trained clergy-person-- I should say something
 160 about my mom. My mom's family also trained. Grandpa, Grandma made all their
 161 kids get a minimum of two degrees. And they taught, now my grandfather, need to
 162 back up. My grandfather on my mother's side was kept on plantation until he was
 163 twenty. And at twenty years of age, he was let, allowed to leave the plantation with
 164 no education whatsoever. Not even grammar school. So at twenty he started
 165 grammar school. And he finished grammar school, he finished high school, he
 166 finished Virginia University, Virginia Union University is one of the historically black
 167 colleges that was set up by the missionaries right after slavery for the freedmen.
 168 And then he finished Seminary in 1902. I mean, I have his diploma at home, 1902 he
 169 finished [his] master of divinity. But with all that education, he and my grandmother
 170 taught at a two-room school in Surrey County Virginia. Boys on one side, girls on
 171 one side. Cause they were determined to pour back into those country kids
 172 everything they had and been beneficiaries of. So it's that kind of context that
 173 produced my mom and her brothers and one sister. One of her brothers, PhD from
 174 University of Chicago, was the dean at Virginia University. And when I got there he,
 175 while he was there he became the president of Virginia Union. But that whole
 176 Virginia Union University family, when we go down to Virginia, exposed me to the
 177 fact that there's more to ministry than just a pastor. I found out in my high school
 178 years that there's eleven different-- we're talking about fourteen or fifteen now--
 179 professions in ministry. I became fascinated, hanging out in dad's library, with
 180 theological education and biblical studies and hermeneutics. And my aspirations in
 181 high school were to become a seminary professor. I wanted, I wanted to graduate
 182 high school, go to college, and go to seminary and get PhD from divinity school so I
 183 could be a seminary professor so my aspirations were from ministry, now a lot of
 184 people thought, when you hear ministry, oh you mean a preacher. No, I do not mean
 185 a preacher. I mean there are all kinds of other things that ministers do who are
 186 professionally trained from ministry and I don't mean turn my collar on, go to the
 187 pulpit and preach fifty-two Sundays a year. No, that is not what I meant. And I
 188 wanted to, I wanted to be like these people that my dad was introducing me to, that
 189 my uncle was introducing me to at Virginia Union University, persons in the
 190 seminary. Dr ??Sammydoit Proctor?? who became my primary mentor in my college
 191 years as a freshman and ironically enough those in the Christian faith would say
 192 providentially enough, the man whom I wrote my doctorate, ??Sammydoit
 193 Proctor??. Sam was a member of the Bank Street Baptist Church in Norfolk Virginia.
 194 My uncle pastored that church. So I got to know Sam as a kid, and Sam had a PhD
 195 from Boston University. Sam was one of Martin Luther King's teachers, all right? So I
 196 knew a professor of theology who had finished ??crosure??. seminary, and finished
 197 Boston Theological Seminary, so that was like the model for me, that I wanted to,
 198 wanted to be, and that's what I was aspiring to be in my high school.

199 AP: Um, tell me, when did you first become aware of things like politics?

200 JW: On those trips south. My-- when our parents would I guess when it first really
 201 started sinking in, six, seven, eight years of age, uh, we had to pack a lunch every

202 time we were going to Richmond Virginia, to Surry County Virginia, my mother's
 203 sister and one brother lived in Richmond Virginia, and two other brothers lived in
 204 Norfolk Virginia, and of course I said daddy's family was in Caroline County Virginia.
 205 We could never stay there because his father didn't have any facilities for us to stay.
 206 It was a house-- one of those old shotgun houses with no bathroom, outhouse and
 207 pumped for water. But we had to pack a lunch, and I never understood, we're
 208 passing all these restaurants, why we'd pack a lunch in Philadelphia. Because of the
 209 laws. The politics, the laws say once we got south of Washington, DC, south really of
 210 the Mason-Dixon line. And I used to look for that when we'd go down the road. I'm
 211 trying to find what does it look like? What does the Mason-Dixon line look like?
 212 Because of the Mason-Dixon Agreement, that those cities and states south of the
 213 Mason-Dixon line had laws, politics said blacks cannot use the same washroom,
 214 blacks cannot sit in the same classroom, blacks cannot be in the same public
 215 facilities. That's when I first became aware as a kid and my father used to keep
 216 asking us, you gotta go to the bathroom? You gotta go to the bathroom? Cause once
 217 we got to DC, if you had to go he would not pull into a gas station or a restaurant,
 218 he'd pull over at the side of the road and go in the woods cause he refused to subject
 219 us to segregated facilities like the segregated washrooms in the south. By the time I
 220 got to college, I became acutely aware of my relation to the whole issue of politics,
 221 went up by quantum leaps because the sit-ins broke out and I was in the sit-ins, so
 222 politics in the college years became really ??seen-in-?? in terms of both the gospel of
 223 Jesus Christ and the reality under which African Americans were forced to live,
 224 when I was, what, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old, I was in college.

225 AP: Well we'll get to that sort of thing later on, but I just wanted to clarify, which sit-
 226 ins are you talking about?

227 JW: College sit-ins. The sit-ins at Virginia Union-- I was a student at Virginia Union,
 228 the sit-ins, the same, the Civil Rights Movement.

229 AP: Oh, okay.

230 JW: The sit-ins at Richmond were at Woolworth's, at ??tallheisermelrose??, the
 231 stores that had segregated facilities, the department stores at Richmond Virginia
 232 would not allow you to try on any clothes. You'd pick something and you'd take it
 233 out of the store. First of all, there were no dressing room facilities for people of
 234 color. The dressing rooms were for white people. So you had no way to try [it] on, to
 235 see if it fit. Secondly, they wouldn't let you put on anything and have it not fit and
 236 have to sell it to a white person.

237 AP: Ah, yeah.

238 JW: All the eating facilities in those stores of course were segregated: we could order
 239 food but we could not stand and eat it there. We had to take it out. So we sat in
 240 those stores, and those facilities, um, tried to desegregate them.

241 AP: Okay, um, tell me about when and why did you originally join the military?

242 JW: I was a senior in college and um, as I said I was headed for the ministry, I was
 243 headed for, thought I was gonna be going into the ministry to teach. The seminary.
 244 Well, the path for teaching seminary is similar to, um, to let's take medicine for
 245 instance. If you want to teach cardiovascular dynamics. You teach cardiovascular
 246 surgery. Or you'll teach med-school. You just don't go from college to a graduate
 247 program, no, you gotta go to med-school to become a doctor and then continue
 248 education to get certified to teach med-school. Same thing in the ministry. You don't
 249 just come out of college, high school, anywhere and say seminary. You have to go
 250 through that level so you know what you're talking about when you're talking to and
 251 teaching seminarians. As a senior I could not in good conscience go to seminary. The
 252 next year. Because at that point, I had seen the underside of the beast and belly, in
 253 fact my father told me in his dying years I was trying to figure out why the vast
 254 difference between my sister and myself. And he said, cause we had been like twins,
 255 man, I mean sixteen months apart, we slept in the same bedroom until I was like
 256 third or fourth grade and then we had adjoining rooms with a door that rarely
 257 closed, she rarely closed it unless she was mad at me, the night I left for college that
 258 door was open and we was halfway through the night we was talking to each other,
 259 and all of a sudden there were two different worlds. And I didn't understand, I asked
 260 my dad as he was dying, he said to me, stop and go back to fifty-nine, January. You
 261 left here and you went to the south. And you were in the sit-ins. And from the sit-ins,
 262 what you saw about race relations in this country, to the military, where it got worse
 263 in terms of what you saw. Your sister's been in a white world all her life, she left
 264 here cause like at my school, high school, Central High School, we had 2200
 265 students, 2,000 of them Jews. 200 of us gentiles, and of the 200 gentiles, sixty of us
 266 black. So I grew up in a world, but Laverne, my sister, finished high school and went
 267 to University of Pennsylvania, went through University of Pennsylvania, Rochester,
 268 Rochester to the ??soball??, he said she didn't see what you saw, she didn't live that
 269 experience, that's why you're different and you lived different experiences. And my,
 270 now to the sit-ins, I'm seeing Christians, white Christians and black Christians, we
 271 can sit down together and talk about different issues and dialog intellectually and
 272 calmly in this setting in the campus, but downtown when we're trying to sit down at
 273 Woolworth's, I'm seeing these same Christians, calling me "nigger." And calling
 274 women names and dragging them across, and I said, this is Christianity? In the
 275 south, yeah. In the south it was. I don't know if I can do this seminary thing if this is
 276 what Christianity is, okay? Add to that, the foundational learnings of my dad's
 277 library, compounded by the learnings in college where I'm learning about the
 278 Christian role in the slave trade, churches in the slave castles, where you ask for
 279 god's blessings as you carry Africans across the Atlantic Ocean, raping the women?
 280 This is Christianity? I added to that the black side of the ledger. What are we
 281 protesting back in the Civil Rights Movement? September through May. I go home in
 282 June, we're trying to organize the people in Philadelphia. Woolworth's is a national
 283 chain. Woolworth's is segregating in Richmond. Therefore, we're not, we just don't
 284 want Woolworth's to suffer in Richmond in terms of revenue, we, Woolworth's need
 285 to know this is a national-- So I'm up in Philadelphia trying to boycott and get other
 286 people to boycott Woolworth's, and I'm seeing black Christians walk right across the
 287 picket line and go into Woolworth's. "That's a southern problem, that's not our

problem." And members of my dad's church said this to me. So this is it? This is as far as Christianity reaches? Up to the the Mason-Dixon line? The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was the SOUTHERN Christian Leadership Conference. They didn't go north. And, I don't know if you've read this in your studies yet, but the majority of black clergy in my senior year of college, did not like [Rev Dr Martin Luther] King, did not support King. You know these things take time. But he's an agitator. And I'm saying, if this is what Christianity is about, I cannot in good conscience go to to seminary and play this game. I'm having some problems, having some serious problems. My best friend, a guy I grew up with and we were close from the fourth grade, literally on my twenty first birthday, he was the first person to graduate from high school. I was very proud of him, twenty years old, it took him that long but he finished. He went straight from a high school ceremony into the Marines Corps. And he and I stayed in close contact with each other. So I admired, he was one of my models, in fact my senior year, I drove, I drove from Virginia Union University down to Cherrypoint North Carolina University to talk with him about the stuff I'm struggling with, and I saw all the Marines and I said I like this, I said this is a good excuse not to go to seminary. And I joined the Marines Corps. It got me out of being forced to try to explain to my family, my father, mother and others, why aren't you going to seminary? I'm in the Marines Corps. I don't have to, that's not up for discussion. So that's why, that's why my ??decrees de conscience?? in terms of the race problem and your preparation to teach in ministry. Mmmm. Not, I'm not ready for this. So I'm going to go into the military. While a senior, on the Dean's List, on the Honor Roll, President of the Choir, President of the Fraternity. Everyone thought I'd lost my mind, and I had. [laughter] I quit school and went into the service. That's why.

AP: Yeah, okay. How long and where did you serve?

JW: I served for six years total. I was at, I went to Paris Island when I left Richmond Virginia, went to Paris Island, went to go to boot camp from Paris Island to Camp Geiger, military training, combat training, scuse me. And Camp Geiger is sort of a subset of Camp Lejunne. From here [in Wright's office on Chicago's 95th street] to the loop [downtown Chicago]. That close. I went to Camp Lejunne and served at Camp Lejunne until I got an interservice transfer in '63. I left in '61. In '63 I got an interservice transfer, transfer service is a transfer. The Marines Corps is a part of the Navy, most people don't make that connection as the Marinnnnnes. You know? Water! We used to call them the taxi-cab service. But Marines Corps only was a four star general, commandant, who was under the Navy, the Marines Corps is a part of the Navy, so every Marine is eligible to attend any Navy school, and I applied for the cardio-pulmonary tech welding school. And that was just, I got transferred from the Marines Corps into the Navy, had to come to Great Lakes to do the training. Training of Coreman first, ?? School and from there to Cardiopulmonary school which was at the National Labor Medical School Bethesda, well that school took 52 weeks alone. By this time, two years in the Marines Corps, cardiopulmonary training, sixteen weeks Corps school, a whole year car-- I've got less than a year to do of a four year hitch. The military said no no no, it doesn't work like that. You owe us six years,

332 you've got to extend your term, we didn't send you to school for fifty-two weeks and
 333 have you get out the next year. So I had to end up serving six years, the last four
 334 months at almost four, National Labor Medical Center Bethesda. When I graduated
 335 from cardiopulmonary technology school, I taught in that class and got retained
 336 there as a teacher, as an instructor in the cardiopulmonary school itself. And that's
 337 where I was when I, when I met Bill Moyers and didn't know who Bill Moyers was.
 338 That's where I was when I monitored both of [President Johnson's] surgeries as a
 339 cardiopulmonary technician at the National Labor Medical Hospital Bethesda, so a
 340 total of six years.

341 AP: What was your reaction when Johnson ordered troops into Vietnam?

342 JW: Um, not good. I had been, I had been before Johnson, before Kennedy was killed,
 343 I had been stationed at Camp Lejune during the Cuban [missile] crisis. And during
 344 the Cuban crisis was when my eyes got opened in terms of your term, politics in the
 345 military, and was some very frightening kinds of information that was eye-opening
 346 and life-changing. For instance, when the Cuban crisis started and we put ships to
 347 blockade Cuba, our barracks was right next to the guys, in fact some guys in our
 348 barracks worked in G2 Intelligence. And they started telling us the 'real deal.' You
 349 know it will take, intel shows it will take two and a half, maybe three divisions to
 350 take and hold Cuba. That's how strongly fortified the island is now, since the
 351 blockade. We had a part of the second Marines Division down there. You know what
 352 that means? That means if anything jumps off, you are a statistic that gives the
 353 United States permission to go in and wipe out Castro and you're automatically
 354 dead, all right? I remember reading stuff in history classes back in Virginia Union, I
 355 started talking to the guys in intel, to see if there was any military proof to it, and
 356 found out stuff that was like common knowledge now but it doesn't matter, it's all
 357 over. United States up to the executive office, knew the Japanese were going to
 358 bomb Pearl Harbor, that's why the fleet was sent away, so we'd have an excuse to
 359 get in that war. We couldn't just jump in the war without seeming like an aggressor.
 360 But it's like I'm gonna turn [my back], you slap me, and I'm gonna come back with
 361 full force. I said you mean to tell me they knew those Japanese planes were coming
 362 and we were gonna lose [people]? They said, yeah, you know, you lose some for a
 363 greater good. And I'm figuring this out, you mean to tell me they gave somebody's
 364 life up so we could get in a war? Yeah. And that's what's about to happen in
 365 Guantanamo Bay [Cuba]. All right. So when Vietnam jumps off, um, it's like more of
 366 same. We're not in this war for any democratic purposes, we're not in this war for
 367 anything noble. And not only the guys in G2 were talking to, I'm moving up to
 368 Bethesda now, I'm in the naval hospital, I'm talking with guys whose lives are
 369 mangled forever, and whose stories make this movie Apocalypse Now and
 370 Apocalypse Now 2 version extended seem like a cake walk. To find out what our
 371 military was doing, there was something in Time Magazine, national exposure about
 372 My Lai. My Lai wasn't anything. We did stuff so much worse than My Lai. We-- the
 373 United States Military-- that it would literally, well it literally turned my stomach. I
 374 couldn't eat for, guys coming home with penises, and ears cut off, necklaces, stuffing
 375 their pockets, souvenirs, key chains. That kind of reality of what was going on in

376 Vietnam because it was a war that we knew we couldn't win. Regardless of what,
 377 what we, and when I say 'we' I mean the military, regardless of what, who was that?
 378 The Marines used to laugh and joke about one of our generals was named Chesty
 379 Puller. Chesty Puller in the battle of Min Chon Harbor during the Korean war, they
 380 brought in the bad news, they said, Sir we are surrounded by four divisions of
 381 Korean troops and Chester said "Good, they can't outrun us now." [laughter] You
 382 know, it's that kind of, you can't win this thing, Ho Chi Minh had said, and my whole
 383 time in the military, I kept reading the same kind of regimen my daddy has taught
 384 me, when we were kids and I was reading two or three books a week for six years.
 385 And Ho Chi Minh had said you don't have the troops to win a battle against me. We
 386 got more troops than you've got citizens of the whole United States. So, if we start
 387 something, in Lebanon, it wasn't Lebanon, it was something else. Oh, Cambodia,
 388 North Vietnam, North Korea, when you send some troops in and we start something
 389 over here, and we can send troops, keep sending troops down Ho Chi Minh trail till
 390 you're out of bullets. You can't win this one. Intel was saying the same thing. Now Ho
 391 Chi Minh is trying to, what do you call it, propaganda, trying to get-- these guys are
 392 guys who'd been there, and they'd tell us stories, true stories, that were frightening.
 393 They'd say, "man, you know what happens at night? Out in the dark, the cong, Viet-
 394 cong, talked to us. Now you were in the same digs with a white, Hispanic brother,
 395 you're three and a half, four feet apart, [they'd whisper] hey, hey black G.I., why you
 396 over here? Why you over here fighting for the white man? You know you can't ????
 397 to him when you get back to the states. I'm going to write your obituary for your
 398 tombstone, I'll leave it here, you'll see it in the morning, it says, here lies a black
 399 man, killed by a yellow man, fighting for the white man, who stole that country from
 400 the red man." You know, that's the kind of, you've got psychological warfare going
 401 on, and the guys are saying, but the reality is, we can't win. And they know we can't
 402 win and they just keep sending more troops. And the guys, all you're doing is
 403 counting time. And you got fourteen months. Thirteen months, twenty-nine days.
 404 [laughter] Twenty-seven days. Thomas get killed. Vietnam, for the enlisted persons,
 405 and for some officers, was not a good time and Johnson sending troops and more
 406 troops or Nixon's Cambodia bombing, it was like why are we doing this? Why are we
 407 doing this? It has nothing to do with democracy. It has nothing to do with
 408 democracy as we knew it or as we were then to embrace, these fights are about
 409 business and about people getting rich, not us. Why are we here? So it was not, not
 410 so, it was not good. It was not good.

411 AP: Tell me, who was the first person you remember voting for.

412 JW: Voting for, I guess it would be Kennedy. Let me think, Yeah he was '60, 1960.
 413 Yeah, cause four years from that would b '56, and I was fifteen. John F. Kennedy.

414 AP: Okay. Tell me, how, how do you think your parents influenced you when you
 415 started getting active in the Civil Rights Movement or other movements like that?

416 JW: Well, they supported me and they tried to make me understand why many of
 417 their [church] members in Philadelphia and colleagues were lukewarm/neutral.
 418 Almost like my dad said, they had not lived in the segregated south, that was not an

419 issue for them, it was something they saw on television. They supported me, my
 420 mother's brother carried the sit-ins in the Civil Rights Movement a little further into
 421 the political realm, the Voting Rights Act [of 1964] had not been passed of course,
 422 the laws in the state of Virginia that prohibited black people from voting, and the
 423 barriers that were put up-- poll tax, grandfather clauses, and all those things, he
 424 challenged those things and in fact he ran for the city council in Richmond and had
 425 us as students, not legally of course because he couldn't do that but still he was the
 426 president of the school. We were out at the polls, watching the polls, watching the
 427 blatant discrimination tactics used by official persons of the Republican and
 428 Democratic parties to keep blacks from voting and to steal elections, so my mother,
 429 so they talked about it all the time, as siblings. And they knew what their parents
 430 had been up against, what those who stayed in the south, what their families were
 431 up against, working with her brother and the student movement, so they were very
 432 supportive.

433 AP: Okay. Tell me, um, what year did you come to Chicago, and why?

434 JW: I came to Chicago [laughter] in 1969. Ah, and I came to Chicago to enter the
 435 divinity school of the University of Chicago. That's why.

436 AP: Okay, so now we're getting into sort of the heart of the matter. Tell me about the
 437 first time you had heard about Apartheid in South Africa.

438 JW: Ahm. I had read about it in the '60s, I had read about it in the military, I'd read
 439 about it at Howard University. When I got out of the service, I transferred to Howard
 440 University. I started initially as I said at Virginia Union, I was at Howard. But it really
 441 hit home I would say, '72, '73, when I was teaching seminary, one of my students
 442 was a man named Bongo N'allaguba. He is now Doctor Bongo N'allaguba, was South
 443 African. And he and I started having conversations beyond the classroom, in terms
 444 of what life was really like for him and what living under Apartheid was like for him.
 445 He introduced me to another South African, Tonda L'obo. She was a seminary at
 446 Chicago Theological Seminary. She joined our church, Bongo and them joined. I used
 447 to tease him, Tonda joined the church and Tonda was the first minister ordained by
 448 the church. Tonda and Bongo introduced me to ??Setolay??, who's a South African
 449 anthromusicologist. Setolay and-- all three of them had grown up in ??kwantazoule
 450 netal??. And almost in the curial kind of fashion exploded my knowledge about what
 451 was really going on in South Africa as opposed to what I had read about it in news
 452 media here occurred. I was introduced to Dennis ??Buddis??, Dennis Buddis was a
 453 poet in exile in, I want to say, Northwestern University. I loved the music of Miriam
 454 Mikiba, had no clue about the political issues behind her music, I just liked to listen
 455 to her sing. And ??Huma Secela??, I didn't realize what was going on, I never could
 456 connect any dots until my conversations, long conversations, with the Setola family.
 457 He has a PhD in ethnomusicology from Rockford. Tonda, Bongo, film clips that they
 458 brought us, us meaning the church, they brought us film clips, from the Sharpville
 459 massacre, film clips from Soweto, explained to us what Bantu education was about,
 460 what Hector Peterson was fighting with the students about, how the students led
 461 the way that many of their parents became a part of that movement. Now, while I'm

462 learning this from Tonda, while I'm learning this from Bongo and ??Alkin??, Randall
 463 asked me to come aboard TransAfrica, is also the same years that I cherished
 464 celebrating the ??Mujacaranhu?? every thanksgiving, which is a feast of unity,
 465 showing our oneness as an African people living in Diaspora, not only what was
 466 going on in West Africa, and tracing that journey through the trans-Atlantic slave
 467 trade, but showing how South Africa was going with Apartheid, was very much a
 468 part of our problem as Africans living in the Western Diaspora. Remember too, in
 469 '75 now, I'm with the Commission for Racial Justice the denomination has taken a
 470 very strong stand against Apartheid, including the divestment fight that we had in
 471 this, in this state, and my involvement in the divestment effort, it was then that Alan
 472 ??Busack?? and Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela became names that meant
 473 something. It was then that Steve Biko's black consciousness movement was read as
 474 common. Because that's the media would say, or Cheney who called, Dick Cheney
 475 called Nelson a communist and voted against his being released from Robin Island.
 476 It was then I began to say wait a minute, what I'm hearing in the United States press
 477 and what I'm seeing and learning from my South African friends and in South
 478 African publications are different worlds altogether. That's when my immersion in
 479 the whole TransAfrica divestment anti-Apartheid movement really [began].

480 AP: So, what was, I wonder just thinking back, what was maybe the first thing that
 481 you did that was sort of a concrete thing to oppose Apartheid?

482 JW: Ah, I had our church buy one of the TransAfrica signs, "Free South Africa," and
 483 then I got active in the movement to try to get churches of every denomination of
 484 every race and synagogues, and mosques to buy a sign. A little simple act of buying a
 485 sign and putting it in front of your house of worship, to show that the whole Free
 486 South Africa movement, the whole Apartheid movement was number one that our
 487 faith speaks to as Christians, as Muslims, as Jews, and that we are a people who are
 488 connected to what is going on in Johannesburg, what is going on in Soweto, what is
 489 going on in Guguleto, what is going on in Kailiche, what is going on in Durban, in
 490 Capetown. And, I found out again, almost like the Civil Rights Movement, and the
 491 lack of support from black and white churches for Dr King, prior to his death,
 492 became a saint in their imaginations. Most churches would not buy a Free South
 493 Africa sign. "That had nothing to do with us. We live in Chicago." [laughter] It's like, I
 494 can't believe I'm hearing this. Well of course now my denomination, the United
 495 Church of Christ, is a predominately white denomination. And it has a long history of
 496 involvement in Africa, and in South Africa, most of the historic black denominations
 497 did not and do not, so it was talking two different languages. Our denomination
 498 started for instance a school in Kwazulu Neta Province, Inanda, I-N-A-N-D-A, it's a
 499 seminary high school. Tonda had finished that school. We started-- we, United
 500 Church of Christ, had started that school in the 1800s, or the 1830s. Tonda had
 501 graduated from that school, the first African winner of the Nobel Peace Prize was
 502 chief envoy ??Letuley??. He was a deacon at the Groutville Congregational Church at
 503 United Church of Christ. He's buried today right in the back of the church, in that
 504 church's today seminary. Well, reading about Letuley, I could see, oh my god, they
 505 don't tell us anything over here. They just say he's communist. Communist? The

506 man's a deacon in the UCC church! He's the president! The head of the ANC. They
 507 didn't tell me this. And so learning concretely once, once you put a sign in front of
 508 the church, conversations start. "Why do you have this?" The opportunity to educate
 509 and raise the consciousness of more and more people about what's really going on
 510 as opposed to what CNN, MSNBC, NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox News is saying on the
 511 television about what's going on, so that kind of, that first concrete act was the sign.
 512 I would say close on the heels of that, and this might lead to further questions of
 513 yours, the divestment. I became actively involved in divestment.

514 AP: Go ahead and tell me about that because you're going to cover a lot of ground
 515 here.

516 JW: On a personal level, my decision that my wife and I made about diamonds, the
 517 divestment issue, when TransAfrica started publishing information as did the
 518 United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, and the United Church of
 519 Christ Office for Church and Society, and the United Church of Christ Board for
 520 Global Ministries-- they work in South Africa-- how decisions we make as American
 521 citizens, in terms of buying diamonds, in terms of buying gold, are directly
 522 connected to Apartheid and to the miners of South Africa. How decisions we make
 523 about where we put our money in banks that invest in the ??Krugurand??, and banks
 524 that invest in the African diamonds and banks that invest in keeping the machinery
 525 of Apartheid going, it's like, oh my god, we're almost back to the sit-ins. Well the sit-
 526 ins were not just to demonstrate to the media and to the public the injustices. No,
 527 it's to cripple financially these businesses, that are profiting using segregation as a
 528 part of their modus operandi. Well, the only way you gone cripple and get the
 529 attention of the Africaaner government, the Dutch Africaan's church, the apparatus
 530 that keeps Apartheid in place and supported by our government and our military
 531 and our diplomats and so forth and so on is to hurt them financially. So the
 532 divestment movement took off. It's like, all right, we're gonna, we're going to first
 533 start as a denomination that was actively involved in that. And in our denomination,
 534 we passed resolutions that said one of our agencies, the Commission for Racial
 535 Justice, the pension boards, said "Why is your pension money in this?" Board for
 536 Global Ministries [said], "Where are you banking?" What do you mean, an American
 537 bank in South Africa? The president's office, that we then say to all the
 538 instrumentalities of the church, we're not doing business with any business that
 539 does business with South Africa. And we're not banking in any bank that does
 540 business with South Africa, to hurt them financially. We're starting at home. So I'm
 541 going around with other representatives of the denomination making sure that we
 542 passed this resolution, how are you responding, what are you doing, what concrete
 543 steps are you taking? Two years after we passed, no, the year not two years, the year
 544 after the denomination passed its resolutions concerning divestment, I was involved
 545 in questioning all of the instrumentalities: where are you in the process? And we
 546 had a public reporting-- just don't tell me-- and when the Black Caucus met, all of the
 547 instrumentalities, heads spoke about where they were in the process of full
 548 divestment, a year later. Some were in the process because of T-Notes and T-Bills
 549 and CDs and rolling over, as soon as they were rolling over they would pull the

550 money out. One of our agencies, the pension boards, is where the battle lines got
 551 drawn and I got heavily involved with that, personally. They said to us, in that
 552 meeting, "we not divested, we're not going to. It's not about race." I said, what?
 553 "We're a fiduciary responsibility, as trustees of your pension moneys, wherever we
 554 can get the best [return on our investment]. Whether that's ??krugerman?? the
 555 South African, we're gonna get the best return." I couldn't believe my ears. I couldn't
 556 believe my eyes. They stood and I began a campaign waging war against the pension
 557 boards, I'm invested in their pensions. And trying to find out what other pension
 558 boards have adopted this philosophy? Cycles of Christ hadn't. United Methodists.
 559 Why are we? Well we have autonomy in our denomination and nobody can tell them
 560 what to do. And they refused, and we battled until Apartheid ended, they just
 561 refused. Locally our denomination divided up into such ??conmetropol association??
 562 Illinois. Well where is that money being banked? Banking as a denomination at
 563 Continental-- that's why I laughed when I said the things I learned in the divestment
 564 movement, I got involved in the divestment movement. I've got my share of ????.
 565 The President of the Continental Bank. We showed him the resolution that had been
 566 passed by the general senate, as we showed him the resolution that had been signed
 567 by the Illinois Congress of the United Church of Christ, and we're here and we're
 568 asking that you divest all of your holdings from South African banks and South
 569 African businesses, and from businesses that do business with South Africa. Or
 570 we're going to take our money out of your bank. [Laughter] He opened up his
 571 checkbook and said "What's your account number?" [Laughter] And [he]wrote a
 572 check and told us to get out of there. They weren't about to-- I could not, that kind
 573 of, I don't care how many people are suffering or dying under this reality. This is
 574 business. Making money's all we care about. That mentality was, was, a frightening
 575 eye-opener for me. And I kept running into it in the divestment movement, and, and
 576 in the personal decisions, I moved to the personal decision movement. Little of the,
 577 my personal investment in the anti-Apartheid. Just like we had to ask in the
 578 Congregation, what are we doing? What are our agencies doing? Decisions that I'm
 579 making that are affecting? Now remember I've got Tonda, Bongo, Alkin, sharing with
 580 me. What decisions am I making? Well, you want to buy your wife a diamond ring?
 581 Where's that diamond come from? People getting married and you're gonna buy an
 582 engagement ring? Where are the diamonds coming from? Sorta like that movie, you
 583 trace it and it goes to South Africa. But then you make the decision to forego a
 584 diamond, to forego a gold chain, all this bling bling you see these guys, the hip hop.
 585 Where is your money going, that's making you look like this? Well, in tracing the
 586 dollars, in tracing the companies, in tracing the jewels, and the jewelry companies,
 587 we saw just how deep and entangled that web was, straight to South African mines
 588 and South African diamonds. My wife and I made the decision not to buy any
 589 diamonds, and any stones, precious stones, until Apartheid was over. Not just until
 590 Mandela was free, but until Apartheid was over. And trying to get my encouraging
 591 other people to make that kind of decision has been as difficult, was as difficult as
 592 me trying to get people to realize, when you realize when you shop at Wal-Mart,
 593 what you're doing? "But they've got good prices!" [Laughter] God, disconnected. So
 594 it was, uh, an involvement at the TransAfrica level, an involvement in the Free South
 595 Africa sign, it evolved into conversations and panel discussions and speeches and it

596 evolved into the divestment movement both at the national level, denominationally,
 597 local levels with Continental Bank, and the personal decision level in terms of the
 598 decisions that I made and my family made and tried to get other clergy and other
 599 members of the Congregation to make. People who knew Tonda at our church, and
 600 Alkin, they could put a face on it. It was not hard for them to make a decision. You go
 601 on to another church where there is no Tonda, there is no Alkin, there is no history,
 602 you say Sharpsville [massacre], they don't, they say who's he? Soweto, what's that?
 603 Well, it's an uphill battle later trying to get those decisions made, my personal
 604 involvement.

605 AP: Hold on a second, I've got to switch tapes really fast.

606 JW: Okay.

607 [Tape 1 of 3 ends, tape 2 begins.]

608 AP: You know, we can start again. So um, we're talking a little bit about uh, religion
 609 and how religion factors into all this and how you were able to sort of mobilize folks
 610 using religion, right? So, um, tell me now, I'm kind of curious, how did you respond,
 611 because you're using religion to galvanize, uh, opposition to apartheid, how did you
 612 personally react and respond to attempts by you know the South African National
 613 Party to use religion to justify Apartheid?

614 JW: Ah, the same way-- That was not a new fight for me, what they-- and you know
 615 they've repented, you know the Dutch Reform church has publically apologized,
 616 repenting for that theology, but that's getting way ahead of the story. That theology
 617 of white supremacy was nothing new for me. Go back to my daddy's study, go back
 618 to my study and having to read as a teenager and my choosing to read and study his
 619 books, that same kind of quote, religious, quote argument had been used by pro-
 620 slavery personnel in the United States of America. So I was very familiar with that
 621 line of argument. One fascinating book that I read as a, as a teenager, in my dad's
 622 study, was a book called Slavery Defended. Very similar to the defense of the Dutch
 623 Reform Church, the Afrikaner's church, the Nationalist Party, to support God's
 624 having ordained that these people be in slavery, or be in Apartheid, and Apartheid is
 625 permanent, forever separated and segregated as according to God's law. Slavery
 626 defended was a fascinating-- is a fascinating book. It not only lifts up the traditional
 627 arguments of the curse of Ham, it, but it also has essays and chapters by different
 628 scholars one of whom was a PhD from Yale-- Yale-- who said "well we all know that
 629 the problem, this problem started in the Book of Genesis, and it started with Eve's
 630 being tempted. Now the scripture says it was a snake, but everybody knows snakes
 631 don't talk. So what the snake represents is the Negro gardener who seduced Eve."
 632 Now, this is in the 1800s, this is a man from Yale, the divinity school. And with that
 633 kind of thinking, it's like oh my God, you're talking about deeply entrenched racism,
 634 based on scholarship that's mixed in with biblical literalism that has this taking a
 635 sacred myth, a sacred myth of a people and making it factual history? And changing
 636 it from a snake who symbolizes the Negro gardener-- I was used to those kind of
 637 arguments. I was used to the arguments about white supremacy and the curse of

638 Ham. The curse of Ham was one of the famous arguments used by Christians in this
 639 country, also used by Christians in South Africa, to support white supremacy in that
 640 Noah cursed Ham, saying that his generation will forever be servants to his
 641 brothers. Which is hilarious, hilarious for several reasons. One of which is, Arlen,
 642 how many siblings do you have?

643 AP: None.

644 JW: Only child? [Interviewer nods] Well, we [my wife and I] have five children, all
 645 right? And let's take my first three. If one had come out white, one black and one
 646 yellow, my wife and I would have to have a serious discussion about who she'd been
 647 with. All of Noah's kids were the same race. That story is not talking about historical
 648 black, yellow and red, it's symbolic. Noah had three kids, all of whom looked alike,
 649 all right? Now, to take that story, which is symbolic, and make that factual history, is
 650 hilarious. I mean, it's absurd. It's egregious, using it to oppress one race of people by
 651 saying that this man's cursed, or actually not even on Ham-- it's Ham, when Noah
 652 woke up drunk from his sleep in the Book of Genesis, when he passed out drunk I
 653 should say first, Ham, one of the three sons of Noah, was on the Ark of Noah in the
 654 biblical story, came in, Noah pulled off all his clothes, butt naked, so Ham covered
 655 him[self] up. The mistake he made, he did not go back up to his dad and drape him
 656 right there, he walked up looking at him, which is a big sin for the people in that
 657 culture, to see the nakedness of your father. And because he saw his father's
 658 nakedness, his father cursed his son, not Ham, he cursed his grandson, Canaan, and
 659 said cursed are you, Canaan, from this point on. Your people shall be ?? _____??"
 660 Well that became known as the ham doctrine, among Christians, first among Jew,
 661 well, the Israelites before the kingdom split and you've got Juda and Judaism, and
 662 then later on among Christians, to justify the oppression of first the Canaanites--
 663 "cursed are you Canaan"-- and then their descendants, people of color. One of the
 664 arguments used religiously was that before the Noahic, which means Noah's curse,
 665 there was a curse on Cane, that God put a curse on Cane, way back in Genesis III, he
 666 was marked, and the mark he put on him, the racists say, was the color of black skin.
 667 In the Babylonian Talmud, I mean these are old arguments, in the Babylonian
 668 Talmud, the Jewish scriptures say that because Ham looked on his father's
 669 nakedness, God punished him by elongating his penis; they had penises like horses.
 670 That kind of religious undergirding for racism is not unique to the Jewish faith or the
 671 Christian faith, it's in the Koran; the Koran says it's all right to enslave people as long
 672 as they're black. So, the Dutch Africaan's church was nothing new to me. That
 673 argument, used by the Christian church trying to justify Apartheid, was one with
 674 which I was familiar since high school days. So that's, when I ran into it in terms of
 675 listening to and reading to what the Afrikaners were saying, I said, oh well you
 676 know, this is an old civil war maneuver. It's the same thing that was used in the
 677 United States, and in the west, or trans-Atlantic slave trade.

678 AP: Okay. So tell me, you plant this sign on the, on the front lawn of your church,
 679 right?

680 JW: Mmmhmmm.

681 AP: And how did your congregation react to your anti-Apartheid activism when it
682 first began?

683 JR: They were very active, very active. Now remember, Tanda was a member here.
684 Tanda was ordained in this church. She was the first minister ordained. So they
685 knew Tanda, they knew the South African story, they knew Sharpsville massacre,
686 they knew Soweto, they knew the townships, so they were very much in support of
687 it because that was supporting one of our members. They also knew the connection
688 between Tanda and ??nonda seminary?? and its work in South Africa. So when you
689 talk about the seminaries, you're talking about Durban, Kwazulu Netal, you're
690 talking about our Netuhley, you're talking about our church. So our members were
691 very behind it, and very supportive because of the connection of like I said earlier,
692 they could put a face on it. They knew Tanda, they knew Bongo. And Bongo at her
693 ordination, Bongo gave her her church, Dr Bongo Nwalegobu, well call it Bongo.
694 Gave her her charge in Zulu. I mean the members were like in awe. To see two South
695 Africans in our congregation, in our sanctuary, speaking in Zulu, they were very
696 much in support of it.

697 AP: Okay. And when you were sort of first getting active in the Anti-Apartheid
698 movement, how long did you think Apartheid would last for?

699 JW: Ahhm. At first I thought it was [pause] going to last for a long, long time. When
700 the divestment movement started, I had a flashback to the sit-ins, and said that its'
701 not until we hit the pocketbooks of the merchants, was there any hope of this, to
702 change the policy. And if this divestment movement works, it's gonna end a lot
703 faster than people think. Ideology aside, theology aside, racial hatred aside, when
704 you start hitting businessmen's pocketbooks, this is, this is not gonna last very long.
705 So I thought, this is it, it's gonna be-- I will live to see a change. At first I didn't think I
706 would live to see a change, and you had the military, you had four million whites
707 controlling the lives of twenty-two million blacks, you had, they had the military,
708 they had all the strength and power to back up that doctrine that had become
709 concretized in 1948, with the official Apartheid. But when divestment started, I said
710 whoa, crack in the dike. I said, if this can succeed, if we can get more and more
711 people aware of what banks are doing business with South Africa, when you start
712 hurting a banker, a banker will make a racist come to the table and talk about
713 changing the policies [chuckle]. So at first I thought it was gonna be forever, or not
714 in my lifetime, but once divestment became a strategy, I said to myself, and to those
715 who were really trying to get to join us in the divestment movement, that this will
716 really bring haste and a quickened end to Apartheid.

717 AP: Um, tell me, was there a particular liberation movement that you supported in
718 South Africa at this time?

719 JW: Both of them. Actually, supported and raised money, we raised money for the
720 ANC and for the PAC. Cause again, because we didn't fall for the media's explanation
721 of these groups, and we had South African members, and then more South African
722 members started joining because of the South Africans belonged here. And they

723 explained to us, from the inside, what the ANC was and all of its broad spectrum of
 724 work, the spear [a reference to the militant wing of the ANC, the MK] was one aspect
 725 of the ANC, and in its charter, it was designed to attack and destroy property, not
 726 people. Not, not what the media was saying. The witnesses, the people from the
 727 inside, the ??kotuwasuazey??, the MK people, and there wasn't that much difference
 728 between them and the PAC. And we were being told how the PAC formed and how
 729 the political differences between, and ideological differences between the young
 730 turks and the old school, they thought "he's getting old and he's gonna sell us out"
 731 and people goin into exile, and one would come back and coalitions would, ??Zapu,
 732 Zanu??, all of that, when we looked at and listened and we invited representatives of
 733 the PAC to speak here, and we listened to them. Now based on what they were
 734 saying and what our [South African church] members were saying, you know, we'll
 735 leave it up to God, we hope they're telling the truth, but our giving is in good
 736 intentions, in terms of, they're talking about money for orphanages and money for
 737 kids and money for orphans and widows, so our money was for that, we're not
 738 sending military materiel kind of stuff, our money was for ANC and PAC, for those
 739 two we supported financially, as well as-- I would say ideologically, in terms of what
 740 we were told by them, so we supported those to primarily South African.

741 AP: Mmhmmmm. Tell me, did you ever wish that you were ever actually in South
 742 Africa, struggling against it rather than in the United States?

743 JW: Ahhmm. Sometimes, sometimes. And I say sometimes for this reason: In addition
 744 to people like ??Elkin??, ??Dennis Brutus??, Tanda, Gobu, reading Steve Biko's stuff,
 745 and reading South African authors, and reading them like you said, the oral histories
 746 in context, reading them not as an isolated incident, but reading them in context of
 747 the race problem over the past 500 years, it was very, very eye-opening for me.
 748 ??Bosak?? spoke at our church. Jacob Kuruthers, has one book entitled, The Irritated
 749 Genie. And in his book The Irritated Genie, he talks about the revolution in Haiti in
 750 the 1800s. A subtext, a sort of text behind the text narrative was very important that
 751 it pertained to me personally has to do with what the French and the Spanish did in
 752 creating, intentionally, the creoles in Haiti. The Europeans were outnumbered, 50 to
 753 1. If those blacks ever rose up, they were in deep doo doo. So the French slave
 754 holders and the Spanish slave holders took black women as their concubines and
 755 had kids with them and created a caste class between them who were neither
 756 African, nor European, British or, pardon me, not British, Spanish or French, but
 757 Creole. Light-skinned. ??Tooselagubucho?? was a light-skinned Creole. And the
 758 Haitians really did not look at him as a hero. He was a Francophile. In fact, he was
 759 tricked by the French, to come back for, he died in prison in France. See because if
 760 the blacks tried to take over that middle layer would keep them, in fact first they
 761 would run and report to them quick what they were getting ready to do. Same thing
 762 was going on in South Africa. Same thing was going on in South Africa. What is
 763 colored? That's the race between the terms we use, blacks, and the whites. The
 764 coloreds, and I would be identified as a colored, and not embraced like I was by
 765 Tanda and Elkin and Bongo, who knew me, I'd be identified as the enemy, that's why
 766 I said sometimes. If they saw me just on sight, unless I had a chance to talk, as I ????

767 can testify to and attest, I would be seen by them as not welcome. And a part of the
 768 problem. Knowing that, there was moments like that, I said no I can fight it on this
 769 side (of the ocean) much better. There were other times when I wanted to go, that I
 770 really felt a kinship and a kindred spirit in ways that are indescribable. One classic
 771 example, they haven't put it up here yet [motions to the wall behind him], this is my
 772 new office, there is an artifact that I have that's probably still packed up, in the boxes
 773 that they're unpacking, for my retired spaces. I kept it over the bookshelf in my own
 774 office as a pastor-- with actual, actual hairs of the animal across the spirit and the
 775 crossed sword of ??Shakazulu?? behind the spear, it was sent to me with one of the
 776 most moving notes, that made me wish I was there. When Tanda was ordained, they
 777 would not give her father a visa, the South African government would not give him a
 778 visa to go to his daughter's ordination. And he wrote me a letter, and sent me that
 779 gift, that was for me, and he said to me, "Thank you for what you're doing for my
 780 daughter, thank you for being her family on that side of the Atlantic, thank you for
 781 being her pastor on that side of the water. Because of the race problem and the
 782 racism that my government here [has], I cannot get a visa to come to my own
 783 daughter's ordination, so I will never get to see you. I probably will die before
 784 Apartheid is over, and am given a visa to come here to the United States. He said,
 785 this gift I'm sending you is because we consider you our warrior on that side of the
 786 Atlantic. And the race and the laws of our countries will not permit us to ever meet
 787 face to face in this life, when you cross that other river, the waters to the eternal, I
 788 will be waiting for you there, my son in the faith. Thank you." Mannn, it was like, I
 789 wish-- and he did die, I never got to meet him face to face, moments like that, ahm,
 790 made me wish I could get there. Before I forget this, breaking up and messing up the
 791 chronology completely--

792 AP: Go ahead.

793 JW: What happened, 2000-- let's see-- had to be 2000. 2000 or 2001. The eight
 794 governor's of the eight different regions, and the eight governors came to the States.
 795 And they came to worship at our church. And one of our South African members,
 796 ??Fumeksalave?? who's a good friend of Lisa Brock's at Columbia, Funeka, who put
 797 together the Miriam Mekeba celebration at Columbia-- Funeka, sent me a note in the
 798 pulpit, letting me know that the governors were in worship and gave me their
 799 names. Now, Funeka and I have, she's amazed and proud of me whenever I have--
 800 cause I can say most of their names [chuckle], I just can't say-- the clicks, with all of
 801 the different click sounds. But I have been saying in Tanda's name in ??___[says the
 802 name in clicks]___?? since '75. And so, I read these names off, ticked 'em off of the
 803 different visiting dignitaries, and Funeka was clapping cause I pronounced 'em all
 804 correctly. And they stood up in our congregation and applauded and we had also of
 805 course, the Robben Island Singers, to come to the church. Before, as they sat down,
 806 something said to me, and of course ???? the spirit said to me, ask 'em if any of them
 807 wants to say anything, they've come all this way. I turned back and I said "Would
 808 any of you like to say a word?" And one of the governors stood up and said, "I would
 809 like to speak." I took that guy the mic, man, and it was one of the most moving
 810 moments in my 36 year of ministry. I gave him the mic and Jeffery, ??Rabin??, my

811 musician, started playing off behind him, [sings in Zulu], and he said, while Jeffery
 812 was playing, "I was a prisoner on Robben Island for 20 years. For 15 years my cell
 813 was next to Nelson Mandela's. While I was on the Robben Island, we did not know if
 814 we would ever get off the island. We did not know if we would ever see our families
 815 again, except through prison bars as they visited us. We did not know, as we
 816 watched our comrades die, or be killed mysteriously, whether any of us would ever
 817 make it." He said, "But we heard of this church in Chicago, that had a Free South
 818 Africa sign on its front lawn, we heard that there were warriors on this side of the
 819 Atlantic fighting on this side of the Atlantic, that if any of us ever got out and ever got
 820 to the United States, we would come to this church, and we would thank you on
 821 behalf of those who died on Robbin Island. So, on behalf of-- he started calling off the
 822 names of the guys that had died, one by one, Thank you, and on behalf of-- and
 823 Jeffery's playin'. Mannn, and I said this makes it all worth it, it makes it all worth it.
 824 We had members who were there for the elections, um, I wasn't there for the
 825 elections, but that, that presence in our sanctuary, thanking us for the guys who died
 826 on Robbin Island was really like oh, this makes it worth it, this will never make
 827 newspapers, it will never make the headlines, it's not as important as, as a visit from
 828 [Desmond] Tutu, or Nelson [Mandela], being freed, or ??Megys?? succeeding, or Jacob
 829 Zuma succeeding there, but in times of what the congregation went through, trying
 830 to get them to see the importance of divestment, the importance of Apartheid and
 831 have this man stand here and watch members you know shedding tears, was like
 832 this moment makes it all worth it.

833 AP: I can imagine. The Robben Island singers, are you talking about the three guys?

834 JW: Mmmhmm.

835 AP: Do you know Jeff Spitz?

836 JW: Yeah, yeah yeah.

837 AP: He's one of my instructors, he actually--

838 JW: I just saw Jeff, we were at Columbia for the Miriam Mekeba celebration there.
 839 But he's been to [Trinity United] church.

840 AP: Yeah, he's a good guy. Sorry, back to the interview. [Chuckle] So tell me, um, I
 841 wonder, you're talking about divestment, how did the tactics that you used to fight
 842 Apartheid, how did they change over time?

843 JW: Ahm [pause] I would say [pause] in terms of the TransAfrica movement, and the
 844 bringing attention to divestment, they almost like, almost like the ANC had different
 845 divisions, Randall Robinson's TransAfrica forum and our denomination's approach
 846 maintained that the fight to end Apartheid had to go on several different levels
 847 simultaneously, it couldn't be either, it had to be both, and both ends, at different
 848 levels. Initially, it became, it was a matter of resolutions being passed and as they
 849 passed the resolution at the denominational level for instance, that was not just a
 850 piece of cake, you had to argue your positions and first of all present material,

851 printed material, to read, understand what you're asking them to vote on and why it
 852 is important. But then in the, are you ready for the questions? Call, presiding people
 853 line up at the mic, to voice their opposition to the resolution, and you had to be
 854 prepared to respond, so there was ongoing procedural kind of civil discourse at the
 855 denominational level. At the same time, these people over here, are protesting,
 856 because that's where the TV cameras are going. That brings attention to it. It's not
 857 going to change anything, but it brings attention to it and makes people start asking
 858 questions, like why are they doing that? Of course, Randall, Randall said start fast,
 859 and he had ??__?? But he brings attention to it, say why in the world is this
 860 important? Resolutions, to sit-ins, people getting arrested, people protesting South
 861 African embassies, down in Washington DC, or here. Wherever there's a South
 862 African embassy, protest. You're going there, you know you gone get arrested. Yes,
 863 we're going, understanding we're going to get arrested, but that's like methodology
 864 used in the sit-in movement to bring attention to the plight of people, we're getting
 865 arrested, these people can't even be in Johannesburg after dark. The average
 866 Chicagoan, white, black and Hispanic, Asian, does not know what Soweto means.
 867 And how Soweto, Southwest Township, blacks had to, you couldn't be in
 868 Johannesburg after dark. Until we started telling them things like, "You ever read"--
 869 this was one of our methodologies in terms of education about Apartheid-- "ever
 870 read Richard Wright's Native Son?" "Oh yeah." "Well, remember back when Thomas
 871 could not be east of State Street after dark? In that book?" "Oh yeah." "Blacks can't
 872 be in South Africa, can't be in Johannesburg unless they're live-in nannies." "What?!"
 873 "No, they can't. Same thing Richard Wright writes about in Native Son is going on as
 874 we sit here talking today because Soweto is Southwest Township of Johannesburg,
 875 that's where blacks." "I didn't know that." "Of course you didn't know that, it's not in
 876 the curriculum in schools, not a part of the news media's presentation." Well, the
 877 education, well I would say, Arlen, we moved from simultaneously, there were
 878 resolutions still being passed, there was civil discourse and debate still taking place,
 879 but there were also public demonstrations, in terms of persons being arrested at the
 880 South African embassies, or at the banks and companies that refused to divest and
 881 at South African businesses in the various cities. So it was progressing on all of those
 882 levels. I saw it happening, I thought wow, we're fired up ??[company name]??, has
 883 holdings in South Africa, then everybody who's going to the Caribbean on a cruise,
 884 while they're passing out literature on the cruise, the anti-apartheid folk passed out
 885 literature asking people do you know how this is affecting? So it's like, oh no I didn't
 886 know that, it's like that's why I said when you hit that level of money, the pocket and
 887 I said, people are going to wake up. They're not going to wake up and have, I didn't
 888 think, any kind of conversion automatically about the race issue, but they're gone
 889 change some policies because it's affecting their pocketbook. And I saw it progress
 890 to the level [pause] of the symbolic, signs and protest, arrest, to not just arrests at
 891 the embassy, to many people going on hunger strikes, many people engaging in
 892 dialogues with businesses and banks that did business in South Africa, so I saw it
 893 progressing like that, on several levels. Ahm, one of the impenetrable levels, and one
 894 of these, well in Chicago for instance, and Randall's Randall's encouragement was
 895 this, ??__?? A lot of things are going on, but you just do what you can do. The
 896 impenetrable level for us was the government. Our government was not going to

897 stop or back down, we didn't think, with one of the realities which is very painful
 898 and is like taboo, you do not talk about this, was that the South African government
 899 was supported by Israel. And you don't-- mention Israel. Don't mention Israel, they
 900 say you're anti-Semitic. We're talking about Apartheid. We're talking about-- So
 901 forget the governmental, the United Nations has passed resolutions, they don't care,
 902 Israel got the-- forget that. We can't win that one. We can win this one. We can win
 903 this and this because this will bring about the change in policies. Well, that's how I
 904 saw it progressing and changing from nice little polite resolutions [in] '73, '74, at
 905 least our denomination, in the eighties, saying no, divest! Now nobody was talking
 906 about that in '75. I mean we were passing resolutions about our objections to, on
 907 moral grounds and on religious grounds, to defining some of God's creations as less
 908 than human and confining them to an existence like Apartheid, but by the '80s, '85
 909 or '84-- how old's my grandson? He's 22, so that would be eighty-five, he was born
 910 in '87. Yeah, we voted '85, as a congregation, and it escalated to divest, I mean totally
 911 divest, and by '87 as I was saying, I had to meet with the heads of the agencies, to see
 912 our divestment process, that's the year, he was born in '86. My oldest grandson. And
 913 I saw, that's how I saw it escalate, from pieces of paper that somebody at church
 914 might read, we passed it in the annual reading, we posted it on the bulletin board, up
 915 to now, full push for divestment, simultaneously, being underscored in the media
 916 with folks going to jail over the issue, and folks willing to risk their lives in terms of
 917 that being an international movement, not just here but people in other countries,
 918 and whips and beasts and batons and electric prods and all of that, standing in
 919 solidarity with the people of in South Africa, standing in solidarity with those active
 920 in-- Nelson was still in jail. That's how I saw it escalate.

921 AP: You're doing a great job transitioning to whatever my next question happens to
 922 be. Talk about politicians, and American politicians specifically, what did you do to
 923 try and pressure them, like what did you think about Ronald Reagan's policies for
 924 South Africa? [Mutual smiles]

925 JW: Well, we, we, as I said, that was the impenetrable level for us. We wrote letters,
 926 we passed resolutions, we sent them as a congregation, as a Chicago Metropolitan
 927 Association of United Church of Christ, as the General Senate of the United Church of
 928 Christ, as the Commission for Racial Justice at the United Church of Christ, as
 929 TransAfrica, as the Office of Church and Society of the United Church of Christ, all of
 930 which were ignored. We sent them not only to Reagan, we had, our Office of Church
 931 and Society for instance, monitors the voting records of all of the members of
 932 Congress. So we had the voting records of people who voted on these issues. And we
 933 would target those Senators I wouldn't-- like Senators of Utah, but the United
 934 Church of Christ in Utah, would write the Senators in Illinois and the
 935 Congresspersons in Illinois, we'd look at the State Legislature, in terms of our
 936 request for divestment, where are they on this issue, and we would target them in
 937 terms of letters, sometimes in terms of protest, because your failure to vote on this
 938 issue means you're supporting Apartheid, so the danger was letter writing, protests,
 939 invitations to political forums, asked would you please come so we can talk to you
 940 about this? Most of which unless they [already supported] divestment or the end of

941 Apartheid, they wouldn't come. [Laughs]. But we were involved on that level. But we
 942 had, we had mentioned Reagan. Which was almost a no-brainer. What a lot of people
 943 don't realize is that we in the divestment, we who were part of the TransAfrica
 944 forum, we were part of the anti-Apartheid movement, had problem with Leon
 945 Sullivan, and his constructive engagement. So we were not just against Reagan, we
 946 were against Leon Sullivan, who sat on the board of GM, which is heavily invested in
 947 South Africa. The constructive engagement, that was a very subtle way of
 948 perpetuating the problem. You know, "We shouldn't protest, we shouldn't divest
 949 with these people and constructively engage them and change" it's almost like, like
 950 the Southern strategy back in King's movement, was moral suasion. We can
 951 persuade these people to change. Not when it comes to profits you're not! And we
 952 thought Leon Sullivan who we loved dearly was dead wrong. This is not going to
 953 work. We also thought the creation of Bantustans and the creations of places like,
 954 can't even remember the name of it, ??Sancity??, where the South African
 955 government built a resort. I think it was called Sun City. I've never been there and
 956 refuse to go there, and I would talk-- we take annual, or really biannual sojourns,
 957 trips to South Africa. And our members who saw on television or read in magazines
 958 about Sun City said do you realize why they created that? The Afrikaner government
 959 created Sun City, man it's like Vegas. Casinos, and shows and breasts and butt, kinda
 960 outfits, and track shoes and beautiful scenery, and five star hotels and water and
 961 sports, water sports, created to show an image of South Africa that completely
 962 ignores ??Kaileche?? ??Landa?? ??Bubuletu??, Soweto, this is South Africa. No it is
 963 not South Africa! We America, we're running over there. No, no we're not going. We
 964 disagree with that. And we disagree with tourist companies, tourist agents, and
 965 tourism trying to sell American businesses into places like Sun City so they could be
 966 bamboozled. So our engagement with politicians was polite in some instances, it
 967 was in protests in other instances, and in extreme instances, we would work to get
 968 that person un-elected. And get someone in that office who would vote differently
 969 on the issues that were affecting the lives of hungry kids in townships in South
 970 Africa.

971 AP: I just want to follow up really quickly. You just mentioned that your-- who-- who
 972 was it who's taking the biannual study trips to--

973 JW: I lead them. Ahm. It's-- well while I was the pastor of the church, we have an
 974 Africa ministry. And the Africa ministry would sponsor those trips. I, on each of
 975 those trips each year, I would teach every day. And I teach, them about, they have to
 976 read, the persons who travel with us, have to read resource material like Long Walk
 977 to Freedom by Mandela, and related materials like that, so they can have some idea
 978 about what they're walking into. This is not a shopping spree fun trip. It's to learn,
 979 but my classes in addition to reading materials they would have about South African
 980 reality, over the past 100 years of so, what Long Walk to Freedom covers, the
 981 various acts that were passed, by the governments in South Africa. Or how do you
 982 get a District 6 in Capetown? What is the story of District 6? Things that they were
 983 going to see. My classes would cover the connection between the story of South
 984 Africans, the biblical story, and their story as African Americans, where there were

985 points of tangency and similarity, and points of disconnect. There was a point in our
 986 history when Apartheid and slavery in terms of the strict segregation, were very
 987 similar. There were parts now that you're going to see, some blacks living in
 988 ??Hopensd??? where Nelson lives, are they oblivious to what's going on in the
 989 Townships? Are some of us, who live in Hyde Park, or Hyde Park, oblivious to what's
 990 going on in Cabrini Green? ??Sageces?? The businessmen were well off. And they
 991 cooperated with the government. What are we doing? Where are today's Sageces?
 992 Classes like that. So that the Bible comes alive for them, the faith that they've been
 993 reading, [help them make the connection] between the biblical story, the story in
 994 South Africa. Again, the curse of Ham, where that came from, here's where the
 995 Afrikaans church was, and this reformed church, and you read about it, and this is
 996 why the, this is what they believed, and where it comes from in the scripture, and
 997 how they've repented on that, and how they've changed that, so that the African
 998 ministry, while I was pastor of the church, was the one that sponsored those annual,
 999 bi-annual sojourns. And I should just add, the African ministry, doesn't just go-- they
 1000 go in the summertime to West Africa, and East Africa, in the fall of winter year--
 1001 months I mean, of the year, they go to Brazil. This year they're going to Brazil in July-
 1002 August, then ??_?? Then South Africa. Since I'm no longer the pastor of Trinity
 1003 Church, Pastor Moss [Wright's successor] asked the congregation to vote as I was
 1004 approaching retirement, was that the church would continue to support those trips,
 1005 not just philosophically [chuckle], but they would continue to pay for my leading
 1006 them. Now the members pay for their own, pay their own way in terms of the
 1007 church, so that but more and more the people who join me on those trips are not
 1008 just members of Trinity Church of Christ, they're members of all across where I've
 1009 taught or spoken. Last summer for instance when I was really officially retired, I was
 1010 in Ghana for three weeks with members of a Presbyterian church from East Orange
 1011 New Jersey, so that I'm leading the tours now, the study tours now, but it used to be
 1012 our Africa ministry.

1013 AP: Tell me, what was it like the first time you went to South Africa. When was that?
 1014 What was it like for you being there?

1015 JW: Ahhm. It was like, my first time in South Africa, I'm trying to remember how
 1016 long ago that was. Was like home coming. Because for thirty years now, well, then it
 1017 was twenty years, 75, 95. Maybe 89, 94, for 15 years, I'd had a relationship that
 1018 moved beyond pastor-member with Tanda Ngobu, her dad, Elkin, the
 1019 ethnomusicologist, used to come to our church and teach our choir, African songs as
 1020 an African ethnomusicologist, Bongo Ngalagoba, because of our personal
 1021 relationship, and the other members from South Africa, Ubuchele,
 1022 ??Chekelswezlale??, ahm, and because of my long involvement in trying to end
 1023 Apartheid [pause] I got to meet members of Tanda's family. Her dad had died, which
 1024 is why I said it was like homecoming. I'm trying to think of, Shabarack, Shabarack
 1025 ??Nefumba?? was the name, he joined our church. He was, he worked for the South
 1026 African consulate, he's from Venda. Venda is a part of South Africa and when I went
 1027 to Venda, his people killed a cow for me. To celebrate our fight in the anti-Apartheid
 1028 movement. They gave me a name, the South Africans gave me a name,

1029 ??Vulentweha??, the one who opens the way. And they had never met me, but they'd
 1030 heard about what we had been doing, so it was like homecoming, to see the places
 1031 I'd see on films that Tanda had brought, that Bongo had given, DVDs, to visit those
 1032 historic sites to see Winnie Mandela's home, to go the place where Nelson lived,
 1033 before his arrest, and then where Winnie lived when he went away to prison, to
 1034 actually be in the places, that I read about and heard about and talked about and
 1035 taught about in seminary, was [pause] a very warm, embracing kind of a
 1036 homecoming kind of feeling and experience for me, my first trip to South Africa. My
 1037 wife did not like-- well there were two places-- my wife is not a rustic person. She's a
 1038 five-star hotel woman. In Chaka land, where you stay actually in a Zulu hut, she was
 1039 not happy, because it's a hut. You have openings, and thought openings, crawling
 1040 creatures come. Bats, and things like that. She had a stroke! She woke me up and
 1041 said "I knew you're not gonna sleep with a bat!" She made me get up and kill the bat.
 1042 Going to the forest preserves and spending nights in the forest preserves was a very
 1043 interesting kind of experience. And it's almost like, night and day, the difference
 1044 between urban settings, the townships, and to be in the, be in the out there with the
 1045 wild animals, very educational, things that you learned there that somebody from
 1046 Chicago, somebody from Philadelphia never thinks about. The first time we stayed
 1047 in a game preserve, the guy that was showing us literally about twice the size of this
 1048 window here [motions] he had a big chart, with different kinds of feces on the chart.
 1049 And he says "I'm giving you the shh-t lecture. You gone learn more shh-t about shh-t
 1050 than you ever wished that you knew, but you need to learn these things," and these
 1051 are the things that South African kids have to learn. They have to learn to identify an
 1052 animal by its poo poo. Because while you think you are hunting something, it may be
 1053 hunting you. [Laughter] And you've got to know the difference between food for
 1054 your supper table, and food that you're becoming for theirs. So here are the different
 1055 kinds you will see on this, on this trail we're getting ready to go on, and be careful if
 1056 you get to this kind that's still steaming and-- we go out, we go out at sun-up when
 1057 they go to get water and then in the evening, when they're coming to the water, to
 1058 get water, and fascinating to identify the poo poo and then that's what we're looking
 1059 for. And over there, they'd be very still in the forest. That kind of exciting kind of, I
 1060 never expected to learn things like that. But vast areas of forest preserves, that are
 1061 there for tourists, some tourists camp out there, but my wife said never, never.
 1062 [Laughter] We did stay one time, but it's a secure, it's not a hut like Chaka, it's a
 1063 regular like cabin, camping cabin where you can lock the door. Locking the door's
 1064 not gonna keep the lizards out, the snakes, but she doesn't like to hear that. But it's,
 1065 every time I go, I learn something new. My biggest attraction and joy about going
 1066 every other year is the new people I meet and the new stories I hear and the new
 1067 levels of learning that I personally gain just from being in dialog with the people
 1068 who live there, born and raised there. And some interesting, again, in terms of
 1069 teaching material. A lot of people, African Americans, I'm gonna speak about who go
 1070 with me, they want to know why did this happen, why why, and say can you
 1071 imagine, what African American communities look like, in ??__?? break down in the
 1072 moment, the majority here, but try and imagine what they look like in 1980. Pardon
 1073 me, 1880. Fifteen years after the Civil War, after slavery was over. What has really
 1074 changed? in fifteen years. After they've been slaves since the fifteen-hundreds.

1075 [Laughter] Fifteen years into freedom! And you expect some sort of magic wand's
 1076 waved, they, and add to that the shifting of ANC in exile, ANC fighting the
 1077 government to ANC now the government. [Laugh] You-- you've got some major
 1078 shifts here. These people, these guys from the MK, they know how to fight,
 1079 demolition, they know how to blow up bridges and power plants, they're now in
 1080 charge of education. [Laugh] Come on. These guys have been fighting propaganda,
 1081 now they're in charge of the treasury, I mean that is some major kinds of shifts, and
 1082 some broken hearts in terms of just like America, let's use America for instance,
 1083 some of the people on January 20th [President Barack Obama's inauguration day in
 1084 2009], or November 4th [the day President Obama was elected in 2008], changes,
 1085 I'm gonna have me a job by April! Well you know, it's the people in some of the
 1086 townships, who felt that now, Nelson's out, we can have a black president, Imma get
 1087 a new house. And it's fifteen years later, I ain't got no new house! Well there are
 1088 things like some military stuff that has to be bought cause we gotta protect borders,
 1089 because Zimbabwe, Mozambique, they're still fighting, we need-- You spend the
 1090 money on military, I thought y'all were gonna get me a new house! [Laughter] So
 1091 that kind of grumbling, among the ordinary folk, and listening to their stories, and I
 1092 said put it in context. The expectations were, and what the reality is-- now you've got
 1093 the other reality, and you've got some Americans saying stop stop stop, greed knows
 1094 no race. You find that this big arms deal, Zulus getting money under the table. Does
 1095 Wall Street sound familiar to you? Come on! What did you expect, these people
 1096 would be 8? You know, it's payola, it's the patronage system, all that's going on there
 1097 just like it goes on here. So learning, like one, and I warned them, I warned our
 1098 members in some instances where it has not worked well cause they just ignore my
 1099 warning, that not recently, I would say, ten years ago, some of the questions they
 1100 would ask on the busses as we're rolling from, say, Jo'burg [Johannesburg] to
 1101 Durban, be careful what you ask this black guide. First of all, this company didn't
 1102 have no black guides until the end of Apartheid. They got a job, this is a white
 1103 company that owns this bus and the bus driver's white. You got a black guide who
 1104 was giving you the best they can give you in terms of information. Most of the time,
 1105 notice the difference in when they talk to you when the driver's not around, and
 1106 then when they talk on the bus. So don't ask no questions that's gone put him on the
 1107 spot because the bus driver's listening and he is gonna report back to the owner
 1108 what the guide said. Beware of that. All right? That's just one tip of the iceberg in
 1109 terms of, I've got tourists with me, take that expensive jewelry off and put it in the
 1110 safe in the hotel. Listen when you're going to 47th and Prairie, in Chicago, you're not
 1111 gone wear this up in the township! And that camera costs more than they make all
 1112 year long! Don't do that! But don't ask questions that are gonna get our guides, the
 1113 answers to which. You've read some of this stuff, be aware of it. Man, I think about
 1114 four or five years ago, we rolled to the airport, and some guide asks us, she says
 1115 okay, name the eight provinces, name the official languages, those are fired back at
 1116 her. You're good students, you're good students. Okay, we're about 20 minutes from
 1117 the airport, do you have any questions for me? Things I haven't covered? And one of
 1118 the members said, why do people in Soweto and the people on the street when talk
 1119 to them, black people, like Winnie Mandela more than Nelson? And the driver, I'm
 1120 sitting right behind him, and the driver leans over to hear her response. [Laughter]

1121 She was very diplomatic. She said, well Mr Mandela, after his release and after his
 1122 election, was catapulted into another world with world leaders. Other heads of state,
 1123 other presidents, and he travels in circles that the ordinary people don't travel in.
 1124 Winnie still lives in Soweto. She still shops at the Safeway, the A&P, the-- that
 1125 everybody knows. They see her. They embrace her as one of them. They see that
 1126 Nelson had moved on to another world. In fact the wife that he married was another
 1127 head of state's, he's in another world. And he lives in Hope. Where the president
 1128 lives. She lives where the people live. That's why they don't get to see him, they can't
 1129 put their hands on him and see him like they can her. Which was a very diplomatic
 1130 answer. And she leaned back and so did the driver. They think he sold them out. She
 1131 can't say that! Not working for this company for him to go back and say lemme tell
 1132 you what she said to the Americans. So, that kind of thing, but that's a long answer
 1133 to the question, but each trip, each trip, each time we go there, I try to make sure
 1134 that we leave something also to expand their knowledge of all right, this is South
 1135 Africa today, now you've read about Apartheid, you've read about what they lived
 1136 under in these works, now let's look at what's going on today in terms of it's a brand
 1137 new party, how did that come into being? And what is the, what is the fight about in
 1138 terms of ANC splitting up and now there's a People's Party, ??Pope??. They'll have to
 1139 read that before we go this year.

1140 AP: Just backtracking a little bit, so what year was the first year that you had gone to
 1141 South Africa?

1142 JW: I've been trying to remember, ??___?? was 18, so I would say, when was, when
 1143 was the first elections, '95?

1144 AP: '94.

1145 JW: [Then] we were there '95.

1146 AP: Gotcha, just wanted to check on that. Okay good, so again stepping back just a
 1147 little bit, tell me about as you were sort of fighting Apartheid, what interactions did
 1148 you have with the media and how were you treated?

1149 JW: Oh, the media didn't, unless, we--none. We were not, we were not for instance at
 1150 the heart of the hurricane as Randall was in Washington, DC, the South African
 1151 consulate, all right? I think-- I think, I'm trying to remember back those years. I was
 1152 trying to think back I said I've got to talk to Arlen, I've got to go back to '75, gosh,
 1153 how many years is that now? That's, what, 35 years ago? Can I remember that far
 1154 back? Jesse I think, I know he was arrested but I don't know if that was Washington
 1155 or here at the South African consulate.

1156 AP: Are you talking about Jesse Jackson?

1157 JW: Yeah. The media covers stuff like that. The media doesn't cover divestment. And
 1158 the Free South Africa sign, and the resolutions passed by the Illinois Congress of the
 1159 Chicago Metropolitan Association of Churches. The media, if it bleeds it leads. And so
 1160 no media coverage, no, nobody ever asked from the media about our sign there,

1161 about our work with TransAfrica, cause TransAfrica, you say, TransAfrica, Randall
 1162 Robinson, DC. That's where the focus was. You ask the average media, who are the
 1163 other board members of TransAfrica, where do they live, what cities do they reside
 1164 in, what do they do? Not important, not a news media event, so that there was no
 1165 news media coverage, there was no media attention. At all. Now they would ??__??
 1166 Now we would issue a press release, they'd pick it up in the SouthTown Economist
 1167 somewhere, page 27 [laughter].

1168 AP: All right, how 'bout with law enforcement or the US Government or anything.

1169 JW: None. Well, let me take that none in terms of no official problems. Now when the
 1170 Freedom of Information Act came out, we found out that we were high up in terms
 1171 of being watched.

1172 AP: You talking about the UCC, or--

1173 JW: Both. Well, I made it there because of the United Church of Christ and the
 1174 Commission for Racial Justice. 75, when I was elected Vice-Chairperson of the
 1175 Commission for Racial Justice, it's the same year Ben Chambers had to go to prison,
 1176 because of the Wilmington Ten case, and Ben Chambers, do you know anything
 1177 about the Wilmington Ten case? [interviewer shakes head, no] Well his girlfriend
 1178 was Angela Davis, so you know that part. Law enforcement screwed me, and all of us
 1179 who sat on the Commission from that point on had files in terms of being watched
 1180 by the government, as dangerous subversive types. But we never had-- they never
 1181 arrested us, we didn't know, we never knew we in the Commission for Racial Justice,
 1182 and TransAfrica, if we were being watched or COINTELPRO was, so we would speak
 1183 clearly so they could hear us [laughter] Are you listening? But we never had any law
 1184 enforcement issues in terms of raids or offices torn up or arrests like that, anything
 1185 like that.

1186 AP: Okay, so now you're mentioning some of the organizations obviously, the UCC,
 1187 TransAfrica, Commission for Racial Justice-- so why did you work with these
 1188 organizations and not other organizations.

1189 JW: Well, I was the pastor of the United Church of Christ, number one. And as a
 1190 pastor of the United Church of Christ, from '72 I would say, until about '79, well '79
 1191 we had grown to be the largest church in the denomination, so I became the poster
 1192 child, [UCC committee-members would ask] "can we get him to serve here," "can we
 1193 get him to serve"-- Well I started serving with '75 with the [UCC] Commission for
 1194 Racial Justice, that was an instrumentality of the United Church of Christ, as a part of
 1195 its national structure, back then. The Office for Church and Society, is one of the
 1196 instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ, I was on their Board of Directors,
 1197 my denominational involvement, put me, thrust me into those places. Several people
 1198 have asked me about TransAfrica and my involvement with Randall Robinson and
 1199 I'm smiling and laughing because what happened on the back end-- Randall
 1200 Robinson who was brilliant, a scholar, Randall, to get Randall Robinson to come and
 1201 speak, his fees are, well, let me put it this way, his fees started at ten thousand

1202 dollars. Just to get him, all right? I am one of the founders of the Sammy Dewit
 1203 Proctor Conference, pastor's conference, which is a group of pastors across
 1204 denominational lines, who are interested in social justice, interested in maintaining
 1205 the fight for social justice in the Christian community, interfacing with communities
 1206 across denominational and interfaith lines. And I got Randall to come speak for us.
 1207 At Sammy Dewit Proctor Conference and we don't have any money, and everybody
 1208 was like "How did you get-- did you pay him ten thousand?" I got him because
 1209 Randall Robinson's mother and my mother were at each other's weddings. That's
 1210 how long I've known Randall [laughter]. His brother Maxwell pastored here in the
 1211 city of Chicago, and I went to college together, Virginia Union, so I've known him for
 1212 years. So when he explained to me what TransAfrica was doing, remember now I
 1213 had already met and become involved with Tanda, Bongo, Elkin, and that level of
 1214 Africans in exile, Africans, South Africans living in this country, and I left out
 1215 completely ??Nyatte?? who we also knew, had a relationship with, Nyatte is in
 1216 Detroit, Michigan, he was assistant pastor of a church there, who-- and having her
 1217 for, Randall said here's what we're doing, here's-- it was right at home, a perfect fit,
 1218 plus this was someone I'd known, and because I'd known him all my life, his mother
 1219 and my mother knew each other before we were born, I trusted him and believed in
 1220 the work he was doing, so that's why I became invested with him in TransAfrica.

1221 AP: Okay good, let me switch tapes real fast. This leads into another question.

1222 [Tape 2 of 3 ends, tape 3 begins.]

1223 AP: [Looking back over the different groups] that, um, you have been active in, I'm
 1224 wondering, tell em about any, any sort of conflicts or tensions between these
 1225 different organizations that you were aware of at the time. Do you remember any?

1226 JW: No, I-- I, if there was tension, I didn't know about it because at no meeting at
 1227 which I was a part or no activity at which I was engaged in did any tension ever get
 1228 articulated. I looked around the board of TransAfrica, and some of the work that we
 1229 were doing, which was just not limited to of course South Africa, but was also
 1230 involved with Trans-Africa, Africa across the Trans-Atlantic into the Caribbean, and
 1231 the work that we were doing in Haiti and the work that we were doing in Cuba, a
 1232 trip we took to Cuba was the first time that I looked around at the other members of
 1233 TransAfrica and found out I was in a remarkable minority when it came to church
 1234 involvement [laughter]. Members of TransAfrica were not big on church. They were
 1235 not active in church, they were not active church members, I mean they were strong
 1236 advocates for social justice, strong advocates for peace, strong advocates to end
 1237 Apartheid, strong advocates to change the conditions of the citizens of Haiti, strong
 1238 advocates to end the blockade on Cuba, but they didn't go to church on Sunday like I
 1239 did [laughter]. I did notice that, but there was never any disagreement in terms of us
 1240 debating or arguing with each other, or them taking issue publically in terms of in
 1241 TransAfrica offenses against Rainbow Push, I don't think that ever happened-- if it
 1242 ever happened in any meeting I was in, and there was never any discussion about it.

1243 AP: All right. That was one of the required questions I had to ask you. So tell me,
 1244 during the struggle against Apartheid, how would you get news and information
 1245 about what was going on in South Africa at any given time?

1246 JW: Primarily through, well, through the four sources, I think, or five, one-two-three-
 1247 four-five sources I've named [the members of the UCC congregation who were from
 1248 South Africa], some information would come through the denominational
 1249 structures, which would include the Commission for Racial Justice, the Office for
 1250 Church and Society, and the Illinois Council of the United Church of Christ.
 1251 Remember, our denomination has a-- today it's called Global Witness, it was then
 1252 called Board for World Ministries, and in the Board for World Ministries, those were,
 1253 that's the work of the denomination throughout the world. Throughout the world
 1254 includes Africa. We had actually paid persons, staff persons, ministers, clergy, on
 1255 staff in Kwazulu Natal, in Durban, in Capetown and Soweto. And in Johannesburg, so
 1256 that some of the information would come from them, they still, remember our
 1257 denomination started a school in the 1800s, that school is still there. We still have a
 1258 UCC, in fact, ??she?? finished Chicago Theological Seminary, the chapter of that
 1259 school finished CTS Susan ??Valoquate??, her husband, Scott Valequate, was the
 1260 pastor of the congregational church until he went to Capetown to do his PhD, but
 1261 people on the ground there, we had for instance, one of the ministries in Capetown,
 1262 one of the UCC ministries in Capetown, does a ministry with sex workers. Young
 1263 girls, on the streets of Capetown, so some of that's coming straight from persons on
 1264 the ground doing ministry there, people who were citizens there with the
 1265 denomination there. Other's coming from our members and my friends, who have
 1266 family there. So they're giving us straight scoop, inside scoop which is different from
 1267 what the media is saying about what's going on in that country so that's where,
 1268 those are the primary sources, my personal hookup, friends, Tanda Ngobo, Bongo
 1269 Nalagoba, Finekase Lale, Elkin Sitoley, who have relatives still there who go home to
 1270 visit their, later on Shadreck Mefumbada from the South African Consulate, but the
 1271 Commission for Racial Justice, Office for Church and Society, Board for Global
 1272 Ministries, and our UCC personnel who work, past tense worked and now still work
 1273 in South Africa, those are the primary sources where we would get our information.
 1274 And I should not omit this part because it's very important that-- I just remembered
 1275 it. In this process, particularly I believe starting with TransAfrica, I was blessed to
 1276 meet two people who you know probably both of them very well, of course you
 1277 know Jeff, Prexy Nesbitt [a Columbia College Chicago instructor and former anti-
 1278 Apartheid activist], and Lisa Brock [a Columbia College Chicago instructor and
 1279 former anti-Apartheid activist]. Lisa Brock, is married to Otis Cunningham, whose
 1280 mother is a thirty-year member of this church. So my affiliation with Prexy Nesbitt
 1281 and Otis also places and channels through which I was getting information. I think
 1282 Lisa's son in Tucson and he and my daughter are around the same age-- my baby
 1283 daughter, my baby daughter-- but that hookup in terms of that connection with
 1284 Prexy, cause Prexy, every time Prexy, Prexy is going to South Africa almost every
 1285 other week! [laughter] Forty times a year kind of thing. But the information that he
 1286 would bring back also and that Lisa and Otis would share with me, Otis is Lisa's

1287 husband, so those are the primary sources for my getting information from South
1288 Africa.

1289 AP: You know it was actually Prexy who suggested I interview you.

1290 JW: Really?

1291 AP: So, yeah.

1292 JW: Yeah, I'm getting ready to slip up and forget his name [laughter], but he was an
1293 invaluable source of information and an invaluable resource personally, and it's
1294 always solid in terms of, you're never getting fluff, you're getting fact from him.

1295 AP: That's right. Um, tell me about the time, the time, tell me about the exact time
1296 when you remember learning that Nelson Mandela had been freed from prison in
1297 1990.

1298 JW: Hmm. [pause] I think Tanda called me. Either Tanda, one of my South African
1299 friends slash members called first, before I saw it on television. And I guess my first
1300 impression was, mixed. And by mixed I mean, I was so glad he was out, and it was
1301 like, when I said there's a crack in that dike, this thing is gonna come coming down,
1302 the house of cards is about to be destroyed, here's proof. It was mixed in that when I
1303 got information from Tanda and from Funeka, it was never like what you get on
1304 MSNBC and CNN on the television. I was getting the inside story from South
1305 Africans, from black South Africans, which was always a mixed bag for me, on this:
1306 this last trip, two years ago, in South Africa, I met Funeka's sister's boyfriend. And I
1307 kept teasing him, why haven't you married this girl all these years? Well, he was
1308 with the MK [the militarized unit of the ANC during Apartheid] and he was in exile,
1309 which is why they hadn't been married. But I said you've been out of exile, you've
1310 been home, they would give me information, like, some of the problems that
1311 educated people were having, particularly those in exile who were getting word that
1312 Nelson was negotiating with the enemy. That he's sitting at the table with folks, with
1313 DeKlerk and people like that "we've been fighting all this time, I had a brother die, I
1314 had a cousin die, and you going, this whole negotiated thing, and you're free because
1315 you've been sitting at the table with the enemy." Well, they're giving me that side of
1316 the story, he's out, but you know, he sold out in the process. And I said what? You
1317 know, it's like he's out, Nelson's free, but they didn't give you any idea how he got
1318 there. Then they start telling me the word on the street in South Africa, about stuff
1319 that later comes out in print, that he's been talking to [laughter], negotiating-- so it's
1320 like mixed. Oh no, please don't tell me, well, let's look at the greater good. He's out,
1321 all right? But I got this nagging, mixed I call it, thing in the pit of my stomach. Well,
1322 Jeremiah, you haven't been locked up for 27 years. You don't know what he had to
1323 do to get out. So I can understand it, it's just painful to hear the people on the street,
1324 their read of it is painful. So that's the mixed part. But now, before the public, it's all
1325 celebration, they're not gonna talk about any of that. It comes out later on in print--
1326 well you know, people have to do what they have to do, but let's look at all the good
1327 he's doing, he's fighting against AIDS and so forth and so on. But that's the original

1328 feeling. Cause a South African [congregational] member called and shared with me
 1329 what her family [felt], and I was like oh wow, it's, are you kidding me? [laughter] So
 1330 it was good and not so good, but overall good, just a nagging feeling like you have to
 1331 do. And I'm sorry he had to do anything, and stand on principle. So that's, that was
 1332 my initial reaction to hearing the news.

1333 AP: Tell me about the moment when you realized the struggle had finally ended and
 1334 that Apartheid was gone.

1335 JW: [My reaction was] I hope my wife doesn't hear this [interviewee smiles] because
 1336 she's gonna remind me of the fact that I wouldn't buy her diamonds. And now that
 1337 it's all over, I've got some promises I made several years ago that I've got to keep.
 1338 That was my human reaction. [Laughter] My ministerial reaction [laughter], was
 1339 that it did happen in your lifetime. And it was worth it. It was worth, smart remarks,
 1340 nasty remarks of the opposition who thinks that blacks are inferior, it was worth it.
 1341 It's finally worth it. And I think, not that it was over, but that first election there
 1342 were those long lines and I remember because we sent members. That was even
 1343 more powerful than "Apartheid is over," that these people get to vote for the first
 1344 time in their life. With old folks, standing in line, all day, day and a half, two days
 1345 kind of thing. It's like, it really was worth it. That they get a chance to vote. I guess it
 1346 was worth it was the feeling, that you have a tangible victory without bloodshed. I
 1347 mean, that's, that's, that's a good feeling. Cause, well when I say without bloodshed,
 1348 it didn't take a war [interviewer: mmhmm], that's, there was the military arm of
 1349 them [the ANC's earlier-referenced MK unit], but it did not take needless deaths of
 1350 thousands of people for this thing to end.

1351 AP: Tell me, how did it feel to be part of not just a movement but an international
 1352 movement? How did that feel for you?

1353 JW: That felt very good. As I said, I became aware of those connecting of the dots, I
 1354 should back up in terms of, now remember I came into school in '69 I came to school
 1355 before I started at Trinity in '72, my major was history of religions and as a historian
 1356 of religions, a heavy concentration on Islam and West Africa, I was being exposed to
 1357 the religious beliefs of a people who are not like my people. We were folk from
 1358 Virginia, Baptist, [laughter] and I'm reading about the Sufi, Tangiers, 19th century,
 1359 ??_____?? Learning under that whole culture and having my horizons concretized of
 1360 stuff I had read about now finding and meeting people and then through the historic
 1361 religions piece to that now my denominational work and Bongo Nalagobu, I'm
 1362 meeting South African, I'm meeting Senegalese, I took my oldest, pardon me, my
 1363 second daughter, for her graduation trip, graduation gift, to Senegal. From high
 1364 school. So I'm getting to know Senegalese, I'm getting to know ??_____??, I'm getting
 1365 to know South Africans here, in church up close and personal, I'm beginning to see
 1366 the Pan-African movement and I'd read about Pan-Africanism on the ??duboy?? and
 1367 at Padmore, and at the turn of the century but now to see it at work, and to meet
 1368 people who were personal friends of ??Shakdandadiat??, and to understand that, as I
 1369 said, when Randall Robinson takes us to Cuba, and is talking about Haiti, it's right
 1370 across the water, right over there. To start seeing that this is not just a South African

1371 issue, that this is an international issue, that was confirming for me a lot of the
 1372 things that were going on in my head, my heart and my life. When I took Jeri, my
 1373 daughter, to Senegal, splashed all over the news magazines and papers in ??Akra??,
 1374 what is the capitol of Senegal [Interviewer, laughing, "You know I'm not gonna be
 1375 able to tell you], well, it's a famous city. Pictures of Harold Washington [Chicago's
 1376 first African American mayor], and Senegalese celebrating Harold Washington and
 1377 talking to me in broken English cause that's a French speaking country, about Pan-
 1378 African movement and the importance of Pan-Africa. Well, my time at Howard
 1379 University, my relationship with Charles ??Kabe?? the head of the Commission for
 1380 Racial justice, his wife is Martha Kabe, who shown me the international movement
 1381 going as far back as the Harlem Renaissance, her book on Harlem, Haiti and Havana,
 1382 showing how the themes written about by persons in those three countries were the
 1383 same themes, and when they first started writing they hadn't met each other.
 1384 Although ??Gyueyen?? and Langston Hughes did get to know each other, did become
 1385 friends. Well, reading Steve Biko's Black Consciousness, well, the black
 1386 consciousness movement is going on in other countries. It's like, oh my goodness,
 1387 they've got to be connected here, and ??inbayeez??, the capital of El Salvador, where
 1388 the largest group of Africans are, in Brazil, the Steve Biko Institute, and Pan-Africa.
 1389 Their understanding yourself as a part of a trend of an international movement,
 1390 again as I said earlier, you asked about the things escalating, looking at what's going
 1391 on in different parts of the world and seeing "we're not in this thing alone," all over
 1392 the world, people are taking stands against what is happening in South Africa and
 1393 the ideology that undergirds the 1948 decision to make this an Apartheid state and
 1394 make this official doctrine and law of the country. It felt good to know that, you
 1395 know, you're not out there by yourself and you're not a little small segment
 1396 unrelated to anything, that you're related to people and it's almost like-- it's almost
 1397 like what I had read about in autobiography of Malcolm X. When he went, when he
 1398 made the Hajj [the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca], what he discovered when he made
 1399 the Hajj, that what he had been taught at the Nation of Islam was wrong. And there
 1400 are white Muslims and yellow Muslims and brown Muslims, and Swedish Muslims,
 1401 all kinds of Muslims, that this is not just a little black community on the south side of
 1402 Chicago or Detroit, Philly, New York, Harlem, no. This, I'm a part of something that's
 1403 worldwide. Well it's that kind of feeling, that people were joining in the fight to end
 1404 Apartheid were not all black. Not all Christian. And to find out about South Africa, in
 1405 terms of, have you been to District 6 or do you know about District 6? [interviewer
 1406 shakes head, no] Man, they've got Indians, black and "colored" and whites who
 1407 refused to let the Afrikaner government move and segregate them and when they
 1408 did the Bantustan act and the housing areas act, they were coming in and moving a
 1409 black family out, and the Indian neighbors would move all their stuff into their
 1410 house. [laughter, interviewer says wow] They come, move them, and next the
 1411 Muslims would move into their house. The first time I was in District 6, our guide
 1412 was a Muslim. He said, "I've had more Seder dinners and eaten more Easter eggs
 1413 than you can imagine." Because they honor each other's religious decisions. "I'm not
 1414 trying to convert you." He said, "I'm a devout Muslim, but I've got Jewish friends, I've
 1415 got Christian friends, they celebrate Ramadan with me, I celebrate Seder with them,
 1416 i celebrate Easter with them, and I hate Easter eggs." [laughter] That, here you've

1417 got this isolated folk in District 6 and Capetown who refused to let racism and
 1418 Apartheid destroy their community. Even when they leveled the buildings, they put
 1419 up shanties. They leveled and they put up a little shanty here. And out of that
 1420 evolved, [interviewee motions] I'm doing this for saxophone, a strong jazz
 1421 community, interracial. Multi-racial. When you go to the museum in District 6, they
 1422 show you the pictures of the different jazz groups that, and the years that they were
 1423 formed. That kind phenomena, it's that kind of feeling that it's wonderful, it's
 1424 wonderful that, living in this country, growing up in this country, going back to
 1425 Caroline County, Surrey County, Virginia, lunchbox, no bathrooms, we suffered
 1426 under what Carlos Moore calls a binary understanding of the racial problem. Black
 1427 and white [smiles]. To find out that there's a whole more than black and white, and
 1428 there's a whole lot of white folk, who're not like folk in Richmond or in Norfolk,
 1429 Virginia, who all over this world who said this is unjust. We're not gonna put up
 1430 with this. We're gonna fight, we're standing up shoulder to shoulder, it's more than
 1431 a feeling of black and white together with [Rev Dr Martin Luther] King, no, these
 1432 people were putting their lives on the line to end this thing. That's an exhilarating
 1433 and rewarding feeling for me, was that whole international movement.

1434 AP: Certainly. Um, tell me, when were the times when you felt most discouraged
 1435 about Apartheid and what kept you going during those times?

1436 JW: Ahm, I think, I probably felt most discouraged when I would hear from our
 1437 South African members of another tragedy, or another senseless act for which there
 1438 was no recourse, perpetrated on somebody in their families or in their church at
 1439 home in South Africa. On the one hand, equally as discouraged when I could not get
 1440 persons in the city of Chicago [smile] to understand how important this was. Now
 1441 here you've got international support, you've got help coming from all these other
 1442 countries, and you've got folks right here on the South Side of Chicago, who look at
 1443 you like you're speaking Chinese. And they, they don't speak Chinese. That's
 1444 discouraging. I guess what caused me never to give up hope was, the spirit of Tanda,
 1445 Bongo, Elkin, who, they had lived that experience, but they refused to back down.
 1446 It's like, they inspired me not to give up. You're getting upset because these people
 1447 here won't buy a [TransAfrica Free South Africa] sign, and they're not gone boycott
 1448 no bank or no jewelry store, and they won't even hear what you've gotta say, but
 1449 these people grew up in a township. I mean, and look at them. They're not giving up.
 1450 So that--that--that--that kept me going. One example a pastor, pastor Gomba, G-O-M-
 1451 B-A, he pastors, this is painful- a sure sign of old age [laughter], he pastors in
 1452 Guguletu. Guguletu is a township outside of Capetown. Saint John's Apostolic
 1453 Mission is the name of his church. His church's about the size of these two big rooms
 1454 together with the doors removed [referring to two rooms in the interviewee's office,
 1455 approximately 40 feet long by fifteen feet wide]. Dr Linda Thomas, I don't know if
 1456 you're gonna interview her or not, she's Dwight Hopkins wife, either Dwight or
 1457 Linda, Dr Dwight Hopkins, Dr Dwight Hopkins has one PhD, from Union Theological
 1458 Seminary, and Dr ???? has a second PhD from the University of Capetown. But he
 1459 and Linda lived in Gugulethu, with the Gomba family, while she was doing her PhD,
 1460 she did her PhD on that church, on Saint John's Apostolic Mission, she's the one that

1461 introduced us to that church and to that family. Pastor Gomba, man, you got a
 1462 church this small, he didn't have theological education, and seminary and all that. he
 1463 didn't have any money, and he grew up under Apartheid, so he's doing the best he
 1464 can as by vocation. He's got a little church and he's got a regular job. On the way to
 1465 his regular job one morning, he goes by the church on Monday morning to open up
 1466 the door to take the little offering, and we're talking, what, 30 dollars, 40 dollars,
 1467 he'd drop it off at the bank on his way to work. The cops see him, this black man,
 1468 fumbling in the dark with his key, trying to get in this door, put six bullets in him.
 1469 [pause] The good news is, he's alive. Bad news is, he's so badly messed up he can't
 1470 work again, a real job. But to hear pastor Gomba was gunned down because he's a
 1471 black man, and they think he's breaking in, and nobody gets arrested, nobody does
 1472 any time, there is no recourse for his family, that's discouraging. He's just a black
 1473 man in a township. What are you doing? Who can do what? The police shot him.
 1474 Lucky they didn't put a gun at his hand and say he was trying to shoot them. Tale
 1475 after tale after tale like that, is so discouraging, and many of them not as happy
 1476 ending as that one-- people didn't live. That's overwhelmingly discouraging. You
 1477 know, we sit here trying to decide, "Am I going to Dunkin' Donuts or am I going to
 1478 Starbucks?" These people are fighting a life and death struggle, and you feel helpless,
 1479 that for me was very discouraging.

1480 AP: I wonder, fighting against Apartheid personally, what would you have done
 1481 differently, if you could do over again.

1482 JW: Hmm, differently. Differently-- Well, I don't know. Because, again as I said, I
 1483 pastor a church. Pastored, past tense [smiles]. And being tied down with a church,
 1484 limited what I was able to do in terms of flights of imagination, I'd go there, meet
 1485 with these people and so forth, and I left out one or two other things in this oral
 1486 history. We took the Karos Document. Are you familiar with the Karos Document?
 1487 [interviewer shakes head, no] K-A-R-O-S is a Greek word which means, it's one of
 1488 the two words used for time in Greek. Kronos, K-R-O-N-O-S means chronological,
 1489 Karos means it's the right time. The South African Council of Churches put together
 1490 called the Karos Document, which said now is the time for Apartheid to end. Karos
 1491 Document was the South African Council of Churches saying violence may be
 1492 necessary. Almost like Malcolm X's "By any means necessary, we've got to end." We
 1493 took that Karos document, and made it a church-wide study document where the
 1494 whole church had to read it and we discussed it. That's one of the things we did
 1495 concretely as a congregation up during the Apartheid era. Well, the fantasies say, I'm
 1496 gonna, next time the South African Council of Churches meet, I'll go over there, so I
 1497 can be in the meetings, I can hear the deliberations, I can bring back well-- for the
 1498 different I would like to have been physically present when that doctrine was
 1499 hammered out, cause I know it was not an easy doctrine to hammer out. Now
 1500 remember, I've been in the sit-ins where I've seen black Christians say "these things
 1501 take time" and they wouldn't support King. I know some of those black prisoners
 1502 over there had ????. What are you talking about, violence may be necessary? We're
 1503 following the prince of peace, yes, but we're living under Apartheid. And it may be
 1504 necessary cause power concedes nothing, except with a struggle. An armed struggle

1505 might be, we're hoping it won't be, we're praying it won't be, but it might be an
 1506 option, the only option left open for us. Well, for South African Council of Churches,
 1507 that's an interdenominational group of clergy, seminary professors and lay-people,
 1508 to hammer out that document, I know was an exciting time, and I wish I could have
 1509 been a part of that. I wasn't. And as I said, flights of fantasies said Imma find out
 1510 when the next meeting is, Imma be there to hear how it's being accepted in the
 1511 pews, cause a lot of, I found out, denominationally, a lot of stuff we passed
 1512 denominationally, the folk in the pews, they can't-- you know, I'm still shopping at
 1513 Wal-Mart [laughter] I ain't giving up no diamonds, cause I just got this new chain in
 1514 ??Cabo san Lucas??! [laughter] So that, I wanted to know, and I would hear, again,
 1515 from our members some of the thinking in the pew, and I wondered what it was like
 1516 to be, and probably if I could do anything differently, been a part of that
 1517 international, cause like Dwight Hopkins and some other scholars were over there,
 1518 they saw the actual proceedings that led to documents like that, I would have loved
 1519 to have been a part of that and I probably would have if I could, but then my reasons,
 1520 as a pastor, I gotta be back Sunday. What flight will get me back Sunday? [laughter] I
 1521 got three services on Sunday. Limited what I could do, in many, many ways.

1522 AP: Tell me, was there any, or what backlash did you personally experience because
 1523 you were speaking out against Apartheid?

1524 JW: The only backlash I received as I said earlier was like when the resolutions
 1525 would hit denominational floors for votes at the state level, the city level, Chicago
 1526 Metropolitan Association, state-- Illinois Council of Churches-- or the [national]
 1527 Senate level, that's the delegates from all 39 congregations of the United Church of
 1528 Christ all over the country. Only when they're debating that issue would I find any
 1529 kind of backlash, or rancor or strong feelings of disagreement. And to give you an
 1530 update on what that's like, just so you understand what I mean, there's a movement
 1531 now, internationally with Jewish sponsors who are called by Zionists in the A-I-P-A-
 1532 C [AIPAC, a prominent Israeli lobby], self-hating Jews, to divest from Israel. Now,
 1533 imagine that debate [chuckle], and how heated it's gonna get, among Jews. Well
 1534 among Christians, the same thing. They're saying, you don't divest, just like the
 1535 constructive engagement piece I just mentioned with Leon Sullivan. We shouldn't
 1536 divest. As long as we're going to invest our monies with them, they'll sit at the table
 1537 and talk with us. We're saying, stop! Hit 'em in the pocketbook. So that, with those
 1538 two rabidly, radically opposing viewpoints, the discussions around the resolutions
 1539 that were being proposed got heated at times, and rancor was expressed, and
 1540 backlash in terms of folk, cause you know, you can end discussions just and say,
 1541 "well you're racist" or "you're anti-Semitic" and how did you jump to that? But at
 1542 that point, "Oh he is? Oh!" There's that kind of backlash, because somebody will
 1543 come out of the meeting and say, he's racist. Now they didn't hear a word I said, they
 1544 didn't hear any of the argument, but they heard what this person said, so that
 1545 there's that kind of backlash, when somebody's reacting to what they heard went
 1546 on, at the general assembly, or at the Illinois Conference meeting, so there was that
 1547 kind of backlash, but again, fortunately thank God, no media. Just the denominations
 1548 [laughter].

1549 AP: Fair enough. Tell me, how did being involved in this movement change you as a
1550 person?

1551 JW: It changed me in many, many ways. I just gave you a classic example, showing
1552 you how widely disparate the worlds are when we wake up in the morning
1553 wondering, are we really gonna stick with Starbucks or Dunkin' Donuts. Completely
1554 oblivious to the reality, these kids don't have anything to eat in Gugulethu. Or
1555 Kaileche. It changed me in terms of making me sensitive to, what it's like to live on
1556 two dollars a day. I met people, I know people who live on two dollars a day. It takes
1557 down the level of my buying into the American dream of, you know, am I gonna get a
1558 Gucci, am I gonna get a Rolex. No, I'm not getting either one of them. I cannot in good
1559 conscience do that. As I mentioned earlier, changed me in terms of, all women say
1560 diamonds are a girl's best friend. My wife wanted a diamond. I knew she did. But she
1561 began to see her convicted to the point where she said I'm not, no. Not until
1562 Apartheid is over. Now first of all that impressed me that at least somebody's
1563 listening, somebody's caring. It changed me every time I would see or talk to a South
1564 African members [of my congregation], to hear the story of Hector Peterson. Do you
1565 know that story? [interviewer shakes head, no] When you see in the Soweto posters,
1566 there's a kid being carried, he was the first one murdered. Hector Peterson. I talked
1567 to his mom, I talked to his mom. That, that whole, that changes you to how precious
1568 life is, and what these people are fighting for is their lives. It changed me in terms of
1569 moving from something philosophical that's so tangible. The kids who fought
1570 against Bantu education were kids-- they were not grownups, philosophers, college
1571 professors, these were kids and they're saying no, no, no. No more Bantu education.
1572 That changed me to being more concerned about devoted to, and determined to get
1573 African American kids here concerned about their education. These kids, I mean
1574 they're dying. They're not boycotting like we do with the sit-ins, no they're dead.
1575 Over education. And you won't even pick up a book. You're watching BET and MTV.
1576 It changed me in terms of making more more determined to stop that and open up
1577 kids eyes to the importance of education. And show them, look what these kids did
1578 for their education. To show, it made me more determined, it made me more
1579 sensitive, in many, many ways. It makes the faith, as I said, getting that letter from
1580 Tanda's father, makes the faith that we live and preach and try to teach come alive
1581 in some very concrete ways. Not philosophical or what we consider out and argue
1582 intellectually. No, these are faith decisions that affect future generations and how
1583 they will see themselves, how they will see the world, so it affected me in numerous
1584 ways, almost too numerous to mention.

1585 AP: I wonder, what you learned, during this movement, any lessons that you
1586 learned, how have they helped you later in life, post-Apartheid, what you learned.
1587 How has that helped you?

1588 JW: [pause] What I learned during Apartheid? How, during that struggle, that has
1589 helped me? Ahm, I would say it has helped me intellectually, spiritually and
1590 politically-- when I say politically I mean in terms of political acumen. Seeing,
1591 learning what I did in the Apartheid struggle, about how politics was involved in this

1592 issue, has helped me post-Apartheid to back off of the issues as presented on the
 1593 media, television, and say "let me find out what's really going on." Follow the money.
 1594 What is the real deal here? Cause you found out under Apartheid that what was
 1595 being talked about had nothing to do with the curse of Ham, or whites being
 1596 superior, that God wanted white people over black people, or colored people were
 1597 above the blacks, were gonna be in charge, they're gonna be still in the middle, it had
 1598 something to do with diamonds, and it had something to do with oil, and it had
 1599 something to do with the military, and it had something to do with-- Okay, that kind
 1600 of learning, now here we come to Iraq. What did Iraq have to do with 9-1-1 '01?
 1601 Nothing. And so I'm not buying into the hype. What is really going on? It, that's what
 1602 I mean by politically becoming more astute, to okay, okay, that's what you all are
 1603 saying, what's really going on? Why does Bush choose Condoleezza Rice to be his
 1604 Secretary of State? Could it be that her PhD was in Russian history and literature
 1605 and that Russia and the pipeline that runs through the pipeline runs through
 1606 Afghanistan? Does this have anything to do with how she got to that position? Does
 1607 the pipeline have anything to do with it? In fact, the school of the Americas and
 1608 Colombia-- why this heavy investment? Do we, are we really trying to stop the drug
 1609 trade, or are we protecting the businessmen in Colombia with this-- Ohh, well, that's
 1610 what I mean by politically astute. In the struggle, I learned how it's affected me,
 1611 post-Apartheid, is, a broader tolerance for people, black and white, who just don't
 1612 get it. I mean, they-- take the Wal-Mart issue for instance. Or take Leave No Child
 1613 Behind, or take social issues, the, how do you come up with the money to bail out
 1614 Wall Street, or just AIG, and can't afford health care for all Americans? Something
 1615 wrong with this picture. And what does your faith say about that? I mean, if your
 1616 faith is all about praise and worship and hallelujah, we're going to heaven,
 1617 something wrong with that faith. One of my members, Judge ??Presship?? used to
 1618 say, it's, I saw it in the struggle and it's changed the way-- Jesus did not come to
 1619 earth to make heaven a better place. So how do I take my faith to do with the issues,
 1620 social issues confronting the people today, what the people did. The people of faith
 1621 in the South African council of churches in the townships, across racial lines, in
 1622 South Africa. And where is God in this? I mean, real God, not the God who's gonna
 1623 justify a hierarchical relation with the haves and the have mores and we keep the
 1624 have nots down or that whites are superior to blacks or the blacks are superior to
 1625 whites, no. Not that God. So that, those lessons from the struggle, have affected me
 1626 post Apartheid in terms of my examining the scriptures, my trying to preach
 1627 accurately to people, some of them just don't get it. They don't collect the dots
 1628 between what's going in the scripture, and what went on in Apartheid, what's going
 1629 on in the world in which they live. And this has given me an avid thirst for
 1630 knowledge in terms of reading as much as I can about situations all over the world
 1631 that corporate media does not give me any kind of hope or glimmer of hope for
 1632 truth. That's how it's affected me post Apartheid.

1633 AP: Um, now, okay, this is one of these required questions, it's hopelessly broad.
 1634 Looking back, what are you most proud of?

1635 JW: Again, I've already answered that one. I've most proud of the fact that what we
 1636 did, made a difference in the lives of ordinary people. Such that, the governor
 1637 reported that we made a pact, that if any of us ever got out, this church that we
 1638 heard about on 95th street in Chicago gave us hope and helped us to hold on. That's
 1639 most important. That what we were doing, while we laughed at my Continental
 1640 Bank, while we ignored my people who won't buy a sign, or who won't rest, that
 1641 people on Robben Island, and people who you never thought you'd meet, were
 1642 affected by what you're doing, that's most important to me.

1643 AP: Um, tell me, why do you think it's important that younger people today who
 1644 weren't a part of this movement, why do you think it's important that they learn
 1645 about it?

1646 JW: I think it's important that they learn about it for several different reasons. I'll try
 1647 to summarize them. Much the same way that my Jewish-- remember now I was in
 1648 high school with 2,200 students, 2,000 of them were Jewish, close Jewish friends,
 1649 and much the same way that they say "Never again," it's important that they learn
 1650 about it so that never again we allow anybody on the face of this earth construct a
 1651 social setting that defines people as less than human, that defines one group as
 1652 superior to another, whether that's Sunni-Shiite, Palestinian-Israeli, Black-White, or
 1653 Darfur Christian-Muslims. Whatever [a] society is. They have to know that devious,
 1654 evil system, how it was put into place, so that never again will we allow that to
 1655 happen. And learning about how it happened, how very slowly, like a growing
 1656 cancer, it became just the way things are. God sanctioned it. No, no. There needs to
 1657 be some critical thinking and some hard questions asked and the young people
 1658 learning today about that struggle, about how Apartheid came to be, and how the
 1659 struggle to end it resulted in a free South Africa, I think it's very important. It's
 1660 almost like having—for the same reason that you learn history, so you don't repeat
 1661 the same mistakes that your parents and grandparents make. I think that's why it's
 1662 important.

1663 JW: How 'bout where do you think South Africa's headed?

1664 AP: Oh, deep trouble. [laughter] I think it's headed, I think it's headed in some good
 1665 directions, I don't think getting to the goal of where they would-- where the leaders
 1666 and the people of integrity and authentic concern for humanity, it's not going to be
 1667 easy getting to that, and reaching those goals. I think it's going to be a very difficult
 1668 journey. But I think they have put their finger on something that the world needs to
 1669 learn about. The whole truth and reconciliation commission, the whole, like it or not,
 1670 we are a multi-racial society. Get over it [laughter]. How do we build a world, given
 1671 what we have as givens? There's givens that aren't going away. That kind of
 1672 determination to build a multiracial society that honors all persons of all races, all
 1673 genders, and all faiths, is unique. I mean, not too many countries are following in
 1674 that model. I think that their goal toward making that dream, that dawning of a new
 1675 reality, making it a concrete, just as concrete as the walls of Apartheid, I think that's
 1676 a good thing. I think that's where they're headed. As I said earlier, talking about
 1677 trying to help our members understand, people are people. You've got crooks,

1678 you've got white crooks, black crooks, Muslim crooks, Christian crooks, Hindu
 1679 crooks. Politics, and the stuff that goes on and the arms deals, that's a part of the
 1680 political system of all countries, Muslim, theocracies, democracies, and they're going
 1681 to stumble. They're going to stumble as all human beings and all human institutions
 1682 stumble. This guy, a friend of mine, he worked for IBM, he's in computers, he's an IT
 1683 expert, right? His answer to me, I wanted to slap him, but he's so right, and it
 1684 pertains to this situation in South Africa. Man, my iPhone, Baltimore, Maryland.
 1685 Going to bed at night. Get up, flying to Selma, Alabama to celebrate the 44th
 1686 anniversary of Bloody Sunday. I changed planes and showered. I turn it back on,
 1687 because it's off when you're on the plane. All my contacts are gone. I'm trying to
 1688 figure out what happened. When I hit restore, cause I had like a two hour layover at
 1689 the airport. So I plugged in my laptop to the electric thing in the gate area. I hit
 1690 restore, no contacts. I go back to, the restore before that was in October. Restore
 1691 back then, twenty contacts. So I asked my IT friend, what caused that, man? He says,
 1692 "Anything made by man." I said, you know, that is not an acceptable answer
 1693 [laughter]. I need a better answer. Again, these are human communities, social
 1694 structures made by humans. There gone be mistakes. Mess-ups. But I don't think
 1695 they had the final word. I really think that the same desire and drive of the ordinary
 1696 people, not just the big names, of Bosak, and Tutu, and Nelson and Winnie, ????, I
 1697 think the ordinary folk, Pastor Gombo with six bullets in him, the ordinary township
 1698 people, their desire and hope for a future for their grandchildren, that says never
 1699 again. And we're gonna create a world where that doesn't happen. I think that will
 1700 outweigh the stumbling of the steps and the human frailties that cause people to get
 1701 disgusted and want to give up on the process.

1702 AP: The last question I have written down is, if you were able to speak to, you know,
 1703 somebody who was in your shoes several years ago during this movement, what
 1704 piece of advice would you give them, or activists in future movements or current
 1705 ones, what piece of advice would you give them?

1706 JW: I would probably give them, hmm. The advice-- to build on how I ended my last
 1707 response to my last question, when you look at the people who are sincere, at what
 1708 they did, how they hung on to their faith, and the people who I mentioned, that I,
 1709 when I felt most discouraged, would not give up hope. When you look at them, there
 1710 is a very important ingredient, that's left out of most of the written textbooks that
 1711 I've seen, history books and books on sociology, and political analysis and so forth.
 1712 These are people of faith, and it goes back to, what I was talking about: I looked
 1713 around the table and realized these people don't go to church. Well the United States
 1714 side. The South African Council of Churches put together the Karos document. The
 1715 ??encarta?? party, ??bootalezeh??, Zuma, Gombo, he and I might unite in terms of
 1716 our political belief systems. He's got a large church following, people of faith. Do you
 1717 know what Bishop Tutu and Nelson and those who are dancing when they come out
 1718 of those shoes, when they come out of that church service? The toi-toi. Look at the
 1719 spiritual aspect and the spiritual lives, that's the sacred dance, the toi-toi. To look at
 1720 that, you can look at these people and learn from them. Because I would say to
 1721 somebody in my position, you go on over there and you talk to Tutu about what

1722 South African Council of Church is doing at a national level, you go and talk to
 1723 Nelson Mandela, ??Deke Ozuma?? to talk about how to escape before the-- no, go
 1724 into townships and talk to the ordinary people. Go to Venda, where they kill cows
 1725 and dance in church and worship. And learn from them. Because it is from them, I
 1726 would say to somebody in my position, that you evoke strength in terms of
 1727 understanding how this really is an international movement, much bigger than
 1728 people's particular particularities, geographically, theologically, sociologically, and
 1729 that faith element, that we don't like to talk about, makes us in the West very
 1730 uncomfortable, is a very important element that, why they keep hope alive? Why
 1731 they don't just give up? Pick up a rifle and plow their brains out or shoot the first
 1732 thing they see? That faith element has some invaluable lessons for us, I would say to
 1733 somebody in my position, that you don't ever need to lose sight of. Because when
 1734 you feel discouraged and when it doesn't seem like you're making any difference in
 1735 the world, looking at those people you'll see it does make a difference, and as
 1736 evidenced, what, six years after elections, it's affecting the lives of people whom you
 1737 never knew you were touching. That would be my advice.

1738 AP: Is there anything else you wanted to say.

1739 JW: No, I'm okay. Tell Prexy Nesbitt I said-- What does he say? [laughter] Alluta
 1740 continua. As Prexy always signs his letters to me.

1741 AP: Oh, does, he, okay. Well listen, I want to thank you very much.

1742 JW: Thank you.

1743 AP: You shared a lot with me, and I want to thank you on behalf of the collection and
 1744 the scholars who use it are going to be like, you've got a lot to work through here,
 1745 thank you so much.

1746 JW: Thank you sir.

1747 AP: Also thank you for being so generous with your time.

1748 [End of final tape.]

1749

1750 This videotaped interview was conducted and transcribed by Arlen Parsa
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 1752 Movement Collection Archives at Columbia College Chicago. The interviewer
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